

# CJR

COLUMBIA  
JOURNALISM  
REVIEW

FIRST ANNUAL BOOKS ISSUE

THE PERILOUS JOURNEY  
OF A FIRST-TIME AUTHOR

JOURNALISM VS. HISTORY:  
WHO OWNS THE PAST?

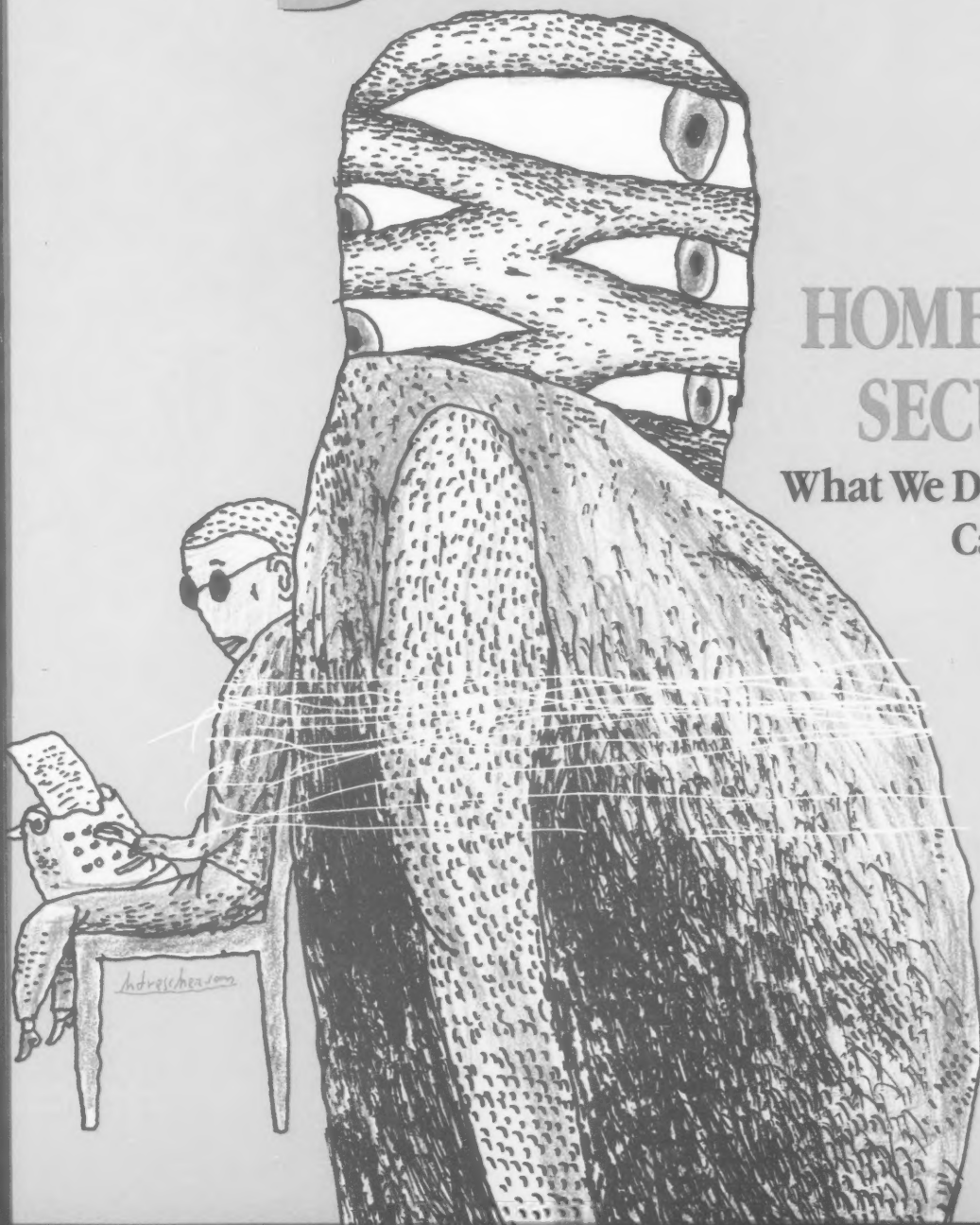
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## OPENING SHOT



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### Who Watches the Watchers?

**S**ome 7 million containers, like the ones above arriving in New Jersey from Pakistan, flow through more than 300 ports and into the arteries of American commerce each year. Before 9/11, U.S. Customs checked 2 percent of them; now that's up to 4 percent. Nobody said safeguarding the homeland would be easy.

But it is Washington's prime objective now, one that has cost billions of dollars and prompted a vast reorganization of government and reams of new regulations. It's quite a story. Yet a *CJR* report shows that coverage of homeland security has been spotty, episodic, reactive, and shallow. Why? Trudy Lieberman explores the question in "Imagining Evil," on page 24. You may have already noticed, meanwhile, that the magazine in your hands has a new look. We asked our art director, Nancy Novick, to come up with a clean and simple design that better reflects a magazine in which words and ideas are the driving force, and one that is a pleasure to read. A key element of the design is a new section, Ideas & Reviews, which will be home to a number of innovative features in coming months. This time it houses articles for our first annual Books issue, anchored by Gal Beckerman's report on the rough and lonely world of publishing as seen through the eyes of a first-time nonfiction author. Please let us know how you like all this, at [editors@cjr.org](mailto:editors@cjr.org). **CJR**

*"To assess the performance of journalism . . . to help stimulate continuing improvement  
in the profession, and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent"*

*—From the founding editorial, 1961*

## ARTICLES

**COVER STORY: IMAGINING EVIL** Why homeland security is dangerously undercovered. **24**

By Trudy Lieberman

**MY LAPTOP, MY LIFE** He's come unplugged. By David M. Halbfinger **20**

**GOD IS MY CO-AUTHOR** An evangelical J-school wants to save our newsrooms, one reporter at a time. **32**

By Gal Beckerman

**THE SHOOTING** A boy is killed, and two young Brooklyn documentarians get real. By Rachel Morris **35**

**LETTER FROM JOHANNESBURG** In South Africa's newsrooms, race still runs through everything. **38**

By Douglas Foster

## COMMENTARY

**EDITORIAL** The boys on the broken bus. **8**

**VOICES** Kenneth H. Bacon on hiding death in Darfur. **9**

Mariah Blake on the myth of the crack baby. Robert D. Kaplan on the lure of the dangerous road.

**Q&A** Howard Dean tells Jane Hall how he got burned by the spotlight. **13**

**DARTS & LAURELS** Hidden cameras in the capitol, bogus op-eds, and more. By Gloria Cooper **16**

**SCENE: OUR READERS, OURSELVES** Truth and the taxi driver. By Brent Cunningham **64**

## IDEAS & REVIEWS — SPECIAL BOOKS EDITION

**ESSAY: WHOSE TURF IS THE PAST?** The boundaries between journalism and history are fading. **46**

By Andie Tucher

**THE EDUCATION OF STACY SULLIVAN** A first-time author learns that getting published **50**

is just the beginning. By Gal Beckerman

**REVIEW** *Pols: Great Writers on American Politicians from Bryan to Reagan*, edited by Jack Beatty. **60**

Reviewed by Christopher Hanson

**EXCERPTS** From the Bush bookshelf, some tasty bits about the press. **62**

## DEPARTMENTS

**OPENING SHOT** **3**

**LETTERS** **6**

**CURRENTS** **18**

**THE AMERICAN NEWSROOM** **22**

**THE LOWER CASE** **INSIDE BACK COVER**

COVER: HENRIK DRESCHER

*"Imagine his response had I managed to utter the phrase 'fair and balanced.'"*

*—Cunningham, p. 64*

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## LETTERS

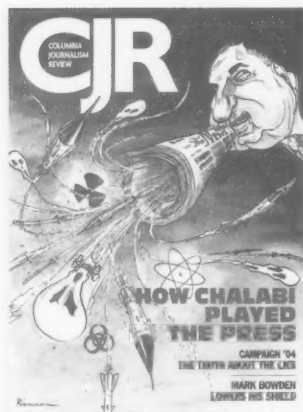
## CHALABI'S HOT LIST

Douglas McCollam's piece, "How Chalabi Played the Press" (CJR, July/August), rightly questions reporters' lack of skepticism and good reporting in accepting and printing information received by the Iraqi National Congress among other sources in the run-up to the Iraqi war.

What the article does not touch on, however, are some other systemic flaws in much mainstream reporting on issues concerning the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and related delivery systems. One fundamental weakness of much reporting is ignorance — reporters with little background in the intricacies of atomic physics or biological weapons dispersal or the experience of weapons inspections are unlikely to be able to challenge what they hear from administration or intelligence officials supposedly "in the know." A second is the competition for scoops from administration sources with limited access to classified information, providing the administration with a golden opportunity for unchallenged spin. A third common fault is that many reporters don't take the extra step of asking outside experts to evaluate controversial claims. A veritable cottage industry of experts on nonproliferation proves another valuable check against groupthink on intelligence assessments and in reporting — journalists and editors would be well-advised to take advantage of them.

Miles Pomper  
*Arms Control Today*  
Washington, D.C.

It is unfortunate that Douglas McCollam didn't call *The Wall Street Journal* before adding its name to the list of "blue-blooded" newspapers that allegedly published bogus stories planted by the now-discredited Iraqi National Congress. Had he done so, he would have learned that the story in question — the only



*Journal* story on the INC's list — had absolutely nothing to do with the INC, Iraqi defectors, weapons of mass destruction, or Ahmad Chalabi.

Had we been contacted, your readers would have learned that Zaab Sethna, an INC spokesman, has told the *Journal* he believes that "the INC's Washington office simply did a LexisNexis search" in compiling the list of articles and "my guess is that Entifadh Qanbar was a little over-eager when he put the list together."

Karen Miller Pensiero  
News editor  
*The Wall Street Journal*  
New York, New York

**McCollam replies:** My piece noted right off the bat that about 25 percent of the stories on this list were irrelevant to the INC's claims. The *Journal's* story (on the oil-for-food program) certainly fell within that group. Though I contacted dozens of reporters whose stories appeared on the list, I focused on those who had used INC defector information in their stories. The *Journal's* reporter was not among those who did and I did not talk with him.

Nice try guys, but I don't buy it. Your attempts to explain the failure of the media to present the truth largely ends up

blaming corporate and political spin doctors and the "sophistication" of the Chalabi operation. Like p.r. was invented yesterday? You fail to take a structural or systemic look at the media business itself.

In the post-*Fahrenheit 9/11* time, I can't help wondering why Michael Moore was able to make such simple and provocative use of media footage while the networks sat around churning out the usual living-room soporifics — with the same raw material! During the film, I kept saying to myself, "I didn't know that!" and "How come the media didn't cover this story?" I wonder, did Eisner want to censor the film because it makes his news properties look bad?

David Sassoon  
Brooklyn, New York

## THE UNCOMPROMISING

Indeed, as Mark Bowden writes in "Lowering My Shield" (CJR, July/August), first-generation black journalists at mainstream news organizations walked a fine line in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and a number of them signed an advertisement that said, "We Will Not Be Spies Against the Black Community!" However, it was not the National Association of Black Journalists that posted that message, circa 1972. It was Black Perspective, a New York-based group that included members who eventually formed the NABJ in December 1975.

Wayne J. Dawkins  
Newport News, Virginia

While I applaud Mark Bowden for reminding his readers of the tremendous contribution Marie Torre made to the shield law issue and to the defense of the First Amendment, I quarrel with his classification of her as a "gossip columnist."

Marie was not Hedda Hopper or Louella Parsons. She was a columnist whose column mirrored the development of television in the 1950s. The Judy Garland





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column that precipitated the lawsuit against CBS — and Marie's refusal to identify the source — was written because the dispute between Garland and the network led to the cancellation of a potential CBS program starring her.

Torre left two small children and a husband to spend ten days in prison because she felt so strongly about the need to protect a source. She was called the "Joan of Arc" of her profession for her stance.

Aviva Radbord  
KDKA-TV News  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

## CLARIFICATIONS

In a July/August Dart to KNXV-TV, in Phoenix, for the extracurricular activities of its anchor, Katie Raml, on behalf of the Republican Party, CJR made reference to a profile of Raml in *The Arizona Republic* in which a professor at her alma mater, the Cronkite School of Journalism at the University of Arizona, had described her as a "role model." In no way should CJR's reference to that profile be construed as implying any criticism of the paper or the professor. When we said we assumed that they were unaware of Raml's activities at the time of the *Republic* interview, we meant just that. Indeed, the profile appeared before Raml participated in the two GOP functions cited in the Dart.

In listing the various ways that the Portland *Oregonian* mishandled the story of the Neil Goldschmidt sex-abuse scandal, a July/August Dart stated that the paper had "inaccurately shortened the reported period of abuse to less than a year rather than the three that were documented in the records." In fact, that three-year period, which was derived from court records filed by the plaintiff, is in dispute: Goldschmidt admits to only a one-year period, and the paper has taken note of the discrepancy in its subsequent reporting.

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## EDITORIAL

## THE BOYS ON THE BROKEN BUS

## Campaign '04: A Progress Report

**G**eorge W. Bush and John Kerry represent fundamentally different ideas about America's role in the world and its domestic priorities. Given what's at stake, this presidential election is the most important in at least a quarter century. So how the press covers it takes on amplified significance, too. For the last eight months, CJR's Campaign Desk has examined the coverage on a daily basis. With two months to go, here are some things we've learned:

Contrary to what many media critics (and media consumers) assert, we haven't seen much ideological bias among mainstream news outlets — for or against either candidate. There are exceptions, of course, but the typical reporter is not an ideological warrior, and the problem of bias doesn't rate the attention it gets.

What does? While coverage has been plagued by many of the usual suspects (the horserace, the trivial), what is most troubling about this election is that the pace and proclivities of the twenty-first-century political campaign have not only magnified some enduring flaws but also rendered some traditional journalistic tenets, if not obsolete, then significantly diminished.

Reducing complicated stories to overly simple narratives is an occupational hazard in reporting. But in the modern campaign bubble, where technological "advances" have reporters on what amounts to a constant deadline, processing a never-ending torrent of digital spin, it's often debatable who is actually framing the stories — the journalist or the campaigns. The poor reporter out on the trail, under orders to break news and remain "objective," usually doesn't have time to reflect, or even to really report in a way that gets beyond the spin. The spinners know this, and exploit it.

This system encourages busy reporters — even good ones — to lean on someone else's version of the truth instead of assembling a more complete version of their own.

In this echo chamber, where reporters talk to the

same sources and to one another, storylines rapidly calify. Consider the "Kerry is a flip-flopper, Bush is steadfast" narrative. This gets repeated over and over in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. But couldn't the flip-flop label be hung just as neatly on a president who derided the concept of nation-building while campaigning four years ago? A president who opposed the 9/11 commission but now praises it? Who swerved 180 degrees on what the UN's role should be in rebuilding Iraq? Who promised a balanced budget and then promptly ran up

the largest deficit in U.S. history?

Another way the press has failed voters this election season has been its refusal, based on a dysfunctional version of "objectivity," to adjudicate between competing claims. Ever afraid of being accused of bias, journalists are just not comfortable saying overtly that one side is right and the other wrong, even when such a verdict is demonstrable. And because of the unprecedented speed with which information moves in this campaign, the candidates and their operatives seem more willing to say whatever is politically expedient,

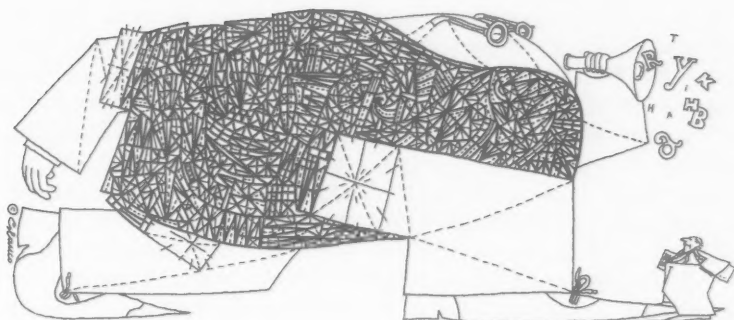
reasonably assured that their version will get uncritical he said/she said play in the story's brief shelf-life.

And if they're lucky, their version — true or false — will become part of the conventional wisdom. For example, the Kerry campaign has been saying since February that 3 million jobs have disappeared since Bush took office. But that number represents the private-sector job losses. The net job loss is significantly lower, at 1.1 million. The 3 million figure became locked into the narrative, and by and large it remains un-debunked at this writing.

None of this is easy, of course. It takes time and manpower to push beyond he said/she said. And most importantly, it takes the collective will to reclaim an adversarial role. What are we afraid of? Loss of access? Maybe less access wouldn't be a bad thing. Such fundamental changes in resources and priorities must come from the top, but they need to come. The *Boys on the Bus* model of campaign coverage is obsolete. **CJR**



## VOICES



GLAUCO DELLA SCIUCCA

BY KENNETH H. BACON

## HIDING DEATH IN DARFUR

## Why the Press Was So Late

**M**odern tyrants understand how to control the media, and Omar al Bashir, the president of Sudan, is a master. His government's efforts to prevent widespread coverage of the death and destruction in its Darfur region succeeded for months. The crisis began in early 2003, but didn't make front-page headlines or the nightly news until this May. As a result, the systematic killing didn't spark enough public outrage to generate a quick international response.

In fact, by the time major U.S. news coverage began, as many as 30,000 people had died and more than a million had been displaced by a government-backed militia called the Janjaweed. In what appears to be an act of ethnic cleansing, the Arab-dominated group attacked black African tribes, killing men, raping women, poisoning wells, razing villages, and destroying crops. The Sudanese air force also bombed some villages. Now, U.S. officials estimate, more than 300,000 people in Darfur could die of starvation and disease before the year's end.

Bashir understands that people respond to tragedies they see unfolding on TV. So when the first international television coverage of the Darfur crisis aired — on Al Jazeera last December — his government closed the network's Khartoum bureau, confiscated its equipment, and arrested the reporter. Sudanese authorities rapidly erected an obstacle course for gaining access to Darfur. It can

take more than six weeks to get a visa for Sudan, and sometimes the government won't grant them at all. Those reporters awarded visas are required to get permission to travel to Darfur, and once they get them, must be accompanied there by a government escort. Even then, soldiers can limit access to pillaged villages or displacement camps.

Journalists from Europe, where the public has more interest in Africa, got around the red tape by sneaking into Darfur from Chad. *Le Monde*, for example, ran a major story from Darfur at the beginning of this year. The British press began to cover the story around the same time.

The earliest U.S. coverage of note came in late 2003 when *The World*, a public radio program, ran a story with UN officials discussing the Sudan crisis. But this story, and two others published inside *The New York Times* in January, didn't generate much follow-up.

However, a steady stream of information from the UN and human rights groups began to generate opinion pieces. In late February, *The Washington Post* ran an op-ed by a Smith College professor entitled "Unnoticed Genocide." In March, the *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof wrote several columns from the border between Chad and Sudan. In April, an op-ed by Samantha Power in *The New York Times* called the U.S. and other nations "bystanders to slaughter" in Darfur. In the absence of TV images and front-page stories, these opinion pieces helped raise awareness.

Then in April, while the world was marking the tenth anniversary of genocide in Rwanda, both President Bush and Kofi Annan issued statements criticizing the government of Sudan for brutality in Darfur. Later that month, Sudan expanded press access,

and the crisis finally started getting major coverage. On May 4, the *Times* ran a front-page story with vivid color photographs. Shortly after, PBS's *The NewsHour* ran a lengthy piece from Chad, and ABC's *World News Tonight* carried a piece from Darfur. Still, the government continued to limit the media's movement and tried to manipulate coverage. For instance, officials emptied refugee camps before Annan's visit so reporters wouldn't see residents languishing in squalor.

In Darfur, thousands of people died before the world took notice. Some of them might be alive today if the press had found ways to move more quickly, such as bypassing Sudanese restrictions by entering Sudan from Chad, reporting through the eyes of refugees in Chad, or paying more heed to reports and pictures from human rights groups. The question now is, What will journalists do the next time a tyrant tries something similar? How can they keep him from getting away with it? ■

*Kenneth H. Bacon, a former Pentagon spokesman, is president of Refugees International.*

BY MARIAH BLAKE

## THE DAMAGE DONE

### Crack Babies Talk Back

**A**ntwaun Garcia was a shy boy whose tattered clothes reeked of cat piss. Everyone knew his father peddled drugs and his mother smoked rock, so they called him a "crack baby."

It started in fourth grade when his teacher asked him to read aloud. Antwaun stammered, then went silent. "He can't read because he's a crack baby," jeered a classmate. In the cafeteria that day no one would sit near him. The kids pointed and chanted, "crack baby, crack baby." Antwaun sat sipping his milk and staring down at his tray. After that, the taunting never stopped. Unable to take it, Antwaun quit school and started hanging out at a local drug dealer's apartment, where at age nine he learned to cut cocaine and scoop it into little glass vials. "Crack baby," he says. "Those two words almost cost me my education."

Antwaun finally returned to school and began learning to read a year later, after he was plucked from his parents' home and placed in foster care. Now twenty, he's studying journalism at LaGuardia Community College in New York City and writing for *Represent*, a magazine for and by foster children. In a recent special issue he and other young writers, many of them born to crack addicts, took aim at a media myth built on

wobbly, outdated science: crack babies. Their words are helping expose the myth and the damage it has done.

Crack hit the streets in 1984, and by 1987 the press had run more than 1,000 stories about it, many focusing on the plight of so-called crack babies. The handwringing over these children started in September 1985, when the media got hold of Dr. Ira Chasnoff's *New England Journal of Medicine* article suggesting that prenatal cocaine exposure could have a devastating effect on infants. Only twenty-three cocaine-using women participated in the study, and Chasnoff warned in the report that more research was needed. But the media paid no heed. Within days of the first story, CBS News found a social worker who claimed that an eighteen-month-old crack-exposed baby she was treating would grow up to have "an IQ of perhaps fifty" and be "barely able to dress herself."

Soon, images of the crack epidemic's "tiniest victims" — scrawny, trembling infants — were flooding television screens. Stories about their bleak future abounded. One psychologist told *The New York Times* that crack was "interfering with the central core of what it is to be human." Charles Krauthammer, a columnist for the *The Washington Post*, wrote that crack babies were doomed to "a life of certain suffering, of probable deviance, of permanent inferiority." The public braced for the day when this "biological underclass" would cripple our schools, fill our jails, and drain our social programs.

But the day never came. Crack babies, it turns out, were a media myth, not a medical reality. This is not to say that crack is harmless. Infants exposed to cocaine in the womb, including the crystallized version known as crack, weigh an average of 200 grams below normal at birth, according to a massive, ongoing National Institutes of Health study. "For a healthy, ten-pound Gerber baby this is no big deal," explains Barry Lester, the principal investigator. But it can make things worse for small, sickly infants.

Lester has also found that the IQs of cocaine-exposed seven-year-olds are four and a half points lower on average, and some researchers have documented other subtle problems. Perhaps more damaging than being exposed to cocaine itself is growing up with addicts, who are often incapable of providing a stable, nurturing home. But so-called crack babies are by no means ruined. Most fare far better, in fact, than children whose mothers drink heavily while pregnant.

Nevertheless, in the midst of the drug-war hysteria, crack babies became an emblem of the havoc drugs wreak and a pretext for draconian drug laws. Hospitals began secretly testing pregnant women for cocaine, and jailing them or taking their children. Tens of thousands of kids were swept into foster care, where many languish to this day.



*Represent* magazine was founded at the height of the crack epidemic to give voice to the swelling ranks of children trapped in the foster-care system. Its editors knew that many of their writers were born to addicts. But it wasn't until late last year, when a handful expressed interest in writing about how crack ravaged their families, that the picture snapped into focus. "I remember hearing about crack babies and how they were doomed," says editor Kendra Hurley. "I suddenly realized these were those kids."

Hurley and her co-editor, Nora McCarthy, had worked with many of the writers for years, and had nudged and coddled most through the process of writing about agonizing personal experiences. But nothing compared to the shame their young scribes expressed when discussing their mothers' crack use. Even the most talented believed it had left them "slow," "retarded," or "damaged." The editors decided to publish a special crack issue to help break the stigma and asked the writers to appear on the cover, under the headline 'CRACK BABIES' — ALL GROWN UP. Initially, only Antwaun agreed. He eventually convinced three others to join him. "I said, 'Why shouldn't we stand up and show our faces?'" he recalls. "We rose above the labels. I wanted to reach other kids who had been labeled and let them know it doesn't mean you can't succeed."

As it happens, when the crack issue went to press, a group of doctors and scientists was already lobbying *The New York Times* to drop terms like "crack baby" from its pages. The group included the majority of American researchers investigating the effects of prenatal cocaine exposure or drug addiction. They were spurred to action by the paper's coverage of a New Jersey couple found to be starving their four foster children in late 2003. For years the couple had explained the children's stunted growth to neighbors and friends by saying, among other things, that they were "crack babies." The *Times* not only failed to inform readers that crack babies don't exist, but reinforced the myth by reporting, without attribution, that "the youngest [of the children] was born a crack baby."

Assistant Managing Editor Allan Siegal refused to meet with the researchers, saying via e-mail that the paper simply couldn't open a dialogue with all the "advocacy groups who wish to influence terminology." After some haggling, he did agree to publish a short letter to the editor from the researchers. While the paper hasn't used "crack baby" in the last several months, it has referred to babies being "addicted" to crack, which, as the researchers told the editors, is scientifically inaccurate, since babies cannot be born addicted to cocaine.

The researchers later circulated a more general letter urging all media to drop the term "crack baby." But the phrase continues to turn up. Of the more than 100 news stories that have used it in the last year, some thirty were published after the letter was distributed in late February.

*Represent's* writers made a more resounding splash. National Public Radio and AP both featured them in stories on crack's legacy. Inspired by their words, the columnist E.R. Shipp called on New York *Daily News* readers to consider the damage the crack-baby myth has done. A July *Newsday* op-ed made a similar plea, and also urged readers to avoid rushing to judgment on the growing number of babies being born to mothers who use methamphetamines.

Still, a number of recent "meth baby" stories echo the early crack-baby coverage. A July AP article cautioned, for instance, that an "epidemic" of meth-exposed children in Iowa is stunting infants' growth, damaging their brains, and leaving them predisposed to delinquency. In May, one Fox News station warned that meth babies "could make the crack baby look like a walk in the nursery." Research is stacking up against such claims. But, then, scientific evidence isn't always enough to kill a good story. ■

*Mariah Blake is an assistant editor at CJR.*

BY ROBERT D. KAPLAN

## 'GET ME TO VUKOVAR'

### The Lure of the Dangerous Road

It was a typical foreign correspondent's experience. Seventy-two hours before, I had been in an urban combat zone in Iraq's Sunni triangle. From a nearby military airfield I caught a ride in a Marine helicopter to another airfield, where I spent the night on a dirty cot on a cement floor. The next day I hitchhiked on another helicopter to yet another airfield, deep in Iraq's western desert, where I slept in a half-opened tent during a dust storm. The day after, I caught a Russian cargo flight to Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. At Sharjah, I said goodbye to the crew and made my way in the dark to the civilian arrivals terminal. Suddenly, I was under bright lights amid noisy crowds of Europeans on holiday, clad in fine clothes and jewelry. A half-hour taxi ride brought me to a luxury hotel in Dubai. I hadn't bathed properly for a long time. My clothes and backpack were layered with filth. People looked at me strangely.

In the lobby, on the way to my room, I noticed a newsstand. The front pages were all about Falluja, where I had just been. It was as though I were at the center of a scan-

dal that everyone was reading about, in which even the most accurate accounts were unconnected to what I knew and had actually experienced. I felt deeply alienated.

Yet I also felt so alive. Following weeks of danger and deprivation, I exulted in a few days of hot baths, fine food, and wine. My silence, too, was a form of pleasure: surrounded by lively young marines for so long, I enjoyed not having to converse with anyone, outside of ordering meals.

In Yemen the year before, my ordeal had been different, and so was the enjoyment afterward. I had decided to travel alone through a tribal area near the Saudi border, where al Qaeda was known to be active. I tossed and turned in bed the night before departing, gruesome scenarios spinning in my mind. Morning brought a skull-like, lack-of-sleep sensation. But the worries and precautions quickly dissolved in the reality of the journey and the associated screw-ups, including the fact that my tribal bodyguards never showed up. During the trip, I was virtually alone with my unarmed driver for long stretches in places where officials in the capital of Sana'a had told me abductions were likely. Yet nothing untoward happened. Emerging on the other side of the dangerous tribal area into the Wadi Hadhramaut of eastern Yemen, I found a charming hotel overlooking an oasis. Its white walls were lined with pink oleanders. I slept deeply, and woke to the meditative sound of birds and the smell of fresh flowers. The tense experience of the previous days seemed like ages ago. I spent the day admiring the mud-brick mini-skyscrapers of the Hadhramauti towns, with their wooden latticework and sky-blue window frames.

On another occasion the return to civilization was less exhilarating. I had just completed an overland journey of several weeks from Istanbul to Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan. When I arrived tired and filthy in the nice lobby of an Ashgabat hotel, looking forward to a comfortable respite, there was a fax waiting, informing me that I had just been attacked in a major magazine in the United States. Instantly, the living-in-the-moment high of travel dissolved and I was back to normal, sedentary existence, with all of its petty worries. Physical safety and creature comforts exact a terrible price in that regard. Thus, there is nothing more therapeutic than being in a remote place out of phone and e-mail contact. Being in a war zone also helps. When mortars are raining down, you don't worry about mortgage payments.

In fact, that sour memory of Ashgabat was nothing more than a compressed version of what happens every time I return from a particularly intense bout of reporting or travel. At first there is an adrenaline-charged feeling of inviolability — *after what I've been through, I'm*

*a new person, I see this sheltered little world where I live from afar. I'll never be vulnerable again.* But even if there is no bad news awaiting you at the hotel reception desk, that feeling lasts only hours, a day or two at the most. It dribbles away in secret, until you realize that you are not a new person after all, and never will be. Yet the experience you've just lived through remains vivid. That leads to a second depressing realization: you now know something vital about the world that no one else does, but it doesn't help you in your daily life. Your experience has only made you lonelier.

Foreign correspondents are particularly oppressed by this sensation. For them, places like Saigon, Beirut, Sarajevo, Kabul, and lately Baghdad are not the places everyone else thinks they know through the headlines and history books, but different, far richer realities. As with Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, it is the very complexity of the truths that they know firsthand that cuts them off from their families and the rest of the world. Henry Tanner, a *New York Times* correspondent of two generations ago, caught the flavor of this in a dispatch he sent from the Congo in 1961:

The Congo is a reporter's nightmare — mostly because the English language is woefully inadequate for describing Congolese affairs.

Words like "strongman," "general," "minister," "offensive," "Communist," or "civil war" all have a generally accepted meaning and presumably evoke a fairly precise image in the reader's mind. Well, let the reader be disabused. Any resemblance between the things he visualizes when reading such words in a dispatch from the Congo, and the things the reporter has seen is strictly coincidental.

The accumulation of such fantastic knowledge that simply cannot be expressed makes dealing with ordinary life difficult. How can you negotiate the mundane yet perilous entanglements of work and family if you are obsessed with faraway places? The solution is constant motion. Never settle down. When reporting or traveling you feel so young; the moment you stop you feel old.

I remember having lunch with a foreign correspondent for a major newspaper in the early 1990s. The fighting in Vukovar in the former Yugoslavia was particularly fierce at the time, and he had just returned to be with his family for a short respite before going back there. It was a typical domestic scene at a lakeside restaurant in Italy. The kids were screaming at the table and his wife was briefly angry with him for not helping her sort things out. He looked at me with a wise smile. His eyebrows raised, he whispered, "*Get me to Vukovar!*" ■

Robert D. Kaplan is a correspondent for The Atlantic Monthly.

Q & A

# BURNED BY THE SPOTLIGHT

INTERVIEW  
BY JANE HALL

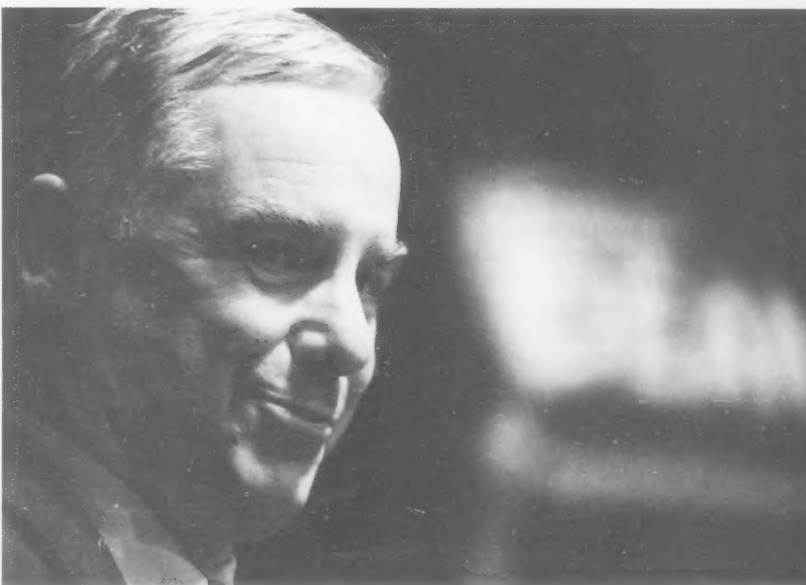
*He seemed to swoop in from nowhere. But the unvarnished outsider named Howard Dean galvanized young voters with his antiwar message and Internet organizing blitz. By the Democratic primary season, the former Vermont governor had raised a record \$41 million and emerged as the front-runner. And his unexpected success made him a media sensation.*

*Then the spotlight burned him. By February, the media were questioning his temperament. He was dubbed "prickly," "botheaded," "abrasive," and "arrogant." Numerous articles questioned his electability.*

*In a recent CJR interview, Dean discussed the press's role in his rise-and-fall candidacy and described the view from inside the media maelstrom.*

*Dean is now campaigning for Senator John Kerry and supporting other candidates through his new organization, Democracy for America.*

## Howard Dean on the Blistering Coverage of His Candidacy and the State of the American Media



RAMIN TALAE/CORBIS

**Why do you think your campaign caught fire with voters? Was it your antiwar stance?**

I think it was my willingness to say what I thought was right. My stance on the war got me attention, but it was also my willingness to challenge President Bush, to say the emperor had no clothes when all the other Democrats were making for the closet.

**The pundits were all saying that it was suicide to go up against George W. Bush, or to be antiwar. Isn't that correct?**

I don't pay any attention to the pundits.

**Okay. How big a role do you think the media played in defining you as the front-runner?**

A huge role. They played a role in the rise and they played a role in the fall. They defined me as the front-runner, and then their idea was to attack the front-runner as much as possible.

**A number of news stories raised questions about your temperament. Why do you think this is?**

That started with spinning from the Kerry campaign in March. At that time, we didn't have a press operation to combat that sort of thing.

**Do you think you did anything that caused the media to begin focusing on your personality?**

I don't know. When Al Gore endorsed me for president, everybody including Bill Clinton thought we were going to get the nomination, and the other guys' campaign people basically got together and tried to figure out how they could take us down, and that [attacking my temperament] was one of the tactics they used. They basically would have said anything.

I think there's a larger problem that really doesn't have a lot to do with my campaign, and that is that the media have changed a lot. You don't see any Woodwards and Bernsteins anymore, because corporations don't give people budgets to not produce a story for a year and a half while they do the research. And that has a lot to do with the new ownership of the media.

**I believe you were quoted as saying you'd like to break up the media monopolies.**

I would. I've heard ninety percent of Americans get their news from eleven corporations.

I think that the biggest problem is that the enormous pressure on the bottom line affects editors' judgments. And it doesn't take too many forced revisions of reporters' stories to teach them that they shouldn't be writing anything that isn't fascinating and scintillating and somewhat scandalous.

**Do you think that leads to a focus on personality instead of candidates' political positions?**

I do. And I think it also leads to putting a lot of things in the newspaper that just aren't so.

**Do you think there's any truth to the idea that the press slighted you because you didn't schmooze them enough?**

Yes, I do. I have a bit of a doctor's personality, you know. I tend to get to the quick of it.

I think it's a dangerous thing to have that schmoozy Washington relationship between reporters and principals, because that's when news doesn't get reported. But everybody is so cozy in Washington. I went to the Gridiron Dinner, and I was appalled to hear [Vice President Dick] Cheney make a remark about duck hunting with Nino [Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia]. Everybody laughed. The truth is, this is a blatant conflict of interest for the bench. If you did that in my state, you'd have to step aside and recuse yourself. But

in Washington, it's no harm, no foul. That's not very good for democracy.

**I wrote a piece for *CJR* in 2000 about how the media favored George W. Bush over Al Gore. Reporters seem to have been taken in by Bush's seeming friendliness. Yet, I don't get the feeling that this administration loves reporters. Do you?**

No, I think they can't stand them. I'll tell you an interesting story about that. I know a reporter. She was on both the Bush and Gore planes. She told me that she thought the reason that Bush got so much better press coverage was that he didn't work that hard. Bush did two events a day and jogged for two hours during the day, so everybody could take a break and file, and there was no pressure. On the Gore plane, they were doing six events a day and she thought that had a huge influence on the coverage, because people were crabby and tired on the Gore plane.

**Do you think the press is treating Kerry unfairly?**

The problem is the national press can't write the same story thirty days in a row. But candidates have to say the same thing thirty days in a row. I've been out with Kerry, and things are going great on the campaign trail. He's energetic, he's engaged. He connects with people. We did a big event, and then we did a small event for people who had lost their jobs. Kerry was terrific. None of that came across in the national press, but it all came across in the local press. So I concluded the local press does a better job of talking about the campaign than the national press, partly because the national press can't write the job story, which is the central theme of the campaign, 800 times.

**What could the press do differently? People aren't going to want to watch the same thing every night on the evening news, are they?**

The truth is, they generally do put that [candidates' daily speeches] in the evening news most nights. The evening news is more accurate and more serious than cable or print. Cable networks have got three hours worth of news and twenty-four hours to fill, and the consequences are perfectly obvious. I think the network TV news — Jennings, Brokaw, and Rather — does the best job. The exception is investigative journalism, which is spotty on the networks.

**Let's talk about the infamous scream speech after your loss in the Iowa caucus. You say the incident didn't happen, at least not the way it was reported.**

That's right. I was in front of 1,200 screaming kids who couldn't hear the speech, and the cable networks ran it as a speech with a directional mic —



no crowd noise and no pictures of the crowd. So it didn't happen at all the way it was on television.

**I heard that reporters in the room didn't think it was that big a deal, and then their editors said, "Did you see that?" And that's how it started.**

The editors said, "How come you didn't say anything about this?" The reporters were there; they didn't think it was a big deal.

**Did you consider asking the networks to play the incident the way it actually happened?**

That never does any good.

**But did you ask them to do it?**

I didn't. I was too busy campaigning. And the press coverage didn't hurt me that much. I don't think the scream had any effect on the campaign whatsoever.

**You don't? Really?**

Well, Edwards didn't have a scream and he didn't win any more primaries than I did. [Laughter]. Basically, whoever won Iowa was going to win the whole thing, and we knew that, and so did everybody else.

**So it's not something you're sitting there chewing over and thinking, "Damn it, they done me wrong?"** I think they done me wrong, but I think there was no harm. I mean, I think it reflects worse on the press than it does on me. Playing the scene 600 or 900 times on cable television doesn't leave you with much respect for the medium. Essentially they figured out a way to take an event out of context on television.

The editors at home made a decision about a story that they knew nothing about. That is the hallmark of what's the matter with the press in this country in the last fifteen years or so. Because of the enormous pressure to "sex up" the news and have a storyline, the truth often is missed — and not the whole truth. There's a nubbin of truth that often becomes not the truth when the story gets out.

**Do you think reporters today often have a preconceived storyline about a candidate, like Dean is angry or Kerry isn't visible enough?**

Yes, I do. They write the story and then they go out and get the quotes to support the story. And that happens much more than reporters are willing to admit. I can't tell you how many disappointed reporters and argumentative reporters I've talked with who really want to write a certain story and I just won't give them the quotes to do it, because I don't think they're pursuing the right story.

**If you were to say to the media, "Next time, let's do it differently," what would be your prescription?**

First of all, I'd probably do more rotation of reporters in the plane. They get sort of jaded. And I'd switch them back and forth between candidates so they would have a broader perspective on the campaign and make more apt comparisons. Secondly, you've got to find a way to empower reporters to stand up to editors. The other day somebody asked me about the role of Al Gore in my campaign, and I said, "Al Gore's endorsement turned out to be the beginning of the end because it gave everybody else the sense that we were going to win and they redoubled their efforts and started to work together to take us down." That was played in several major papers as DEAN BLAMES GORE FOR DEFEAT!

I think at least half the problem comes from editors who push back on reporters and want them to write the story in a different way, having no knowledge of what the story is really about.

**When you're talking about print being worse than broadcast, are you talking about the reporters for *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*?**

Absolutely.

**You want to name some names specifically, people who were covering you?**

I may do that in the book I'm writing, but I'm not going to do it right now.

I'm not saying there aren't good reporters at these papers. But between the reporters and the editors, I was pretty shocked to see how often they got it wrong. Or at least partially wrong.

I'll tell you an interesting story. When I was the front-runner, I went to a Martin Luther King Day event in Iowa, and it was essentially a press riot. There were about fifty or sixty people. One of the congressmen there was knocked down, somebody was hit in the head with a camera lens, and the press was so loud that I had to leave. And they followed me to the bus and pushed and shoved.

The story came across as if I had wrecked the event. Somebody asked me some in-your-face question, and I said, "You know, you guys have got to get a grip and start to behave," which was then cited as a part of my temperament issue! I mean, there's a huge number of problems in this country, and we can muddle through them, but it's not going to get any better unless somebody wants to be serious about it on the media side. ■

*Jane Hall, a former Los Angeles Times reporter, teaches journalism at American University. She is a regular on Fox News Watch.*



## DARTS AND LAURELS



**DART** to KTVO-TV, in Kirksville, Missouri, for digging an electrified tunnel right through the ad-edit wall. When the station lost an advertiser angered by a news story in which the reporter had solicited comment not from the advertiser but from a competitor — a competitor who was not even a KTVO advertiser! — Crystal Amini-Rad, its vice president and general manager, was quick to see the error of her ways. "From now on," she decreed in a memo that included an apology to the sales staff, news reporters will "have access to an active advertiser list . . . of sources which you can tap into" for expert opinion and industry comment. Oh, and one more thing: reporters "should always go" to the station's advertising sources "first."

**DART** to *The Hartford Courant*, for throwing out the journalistic baby with the press-release bathwater. Deluged for years with material pointing to corruption on the part of Governor John G. Rowland — who happens to be a Republican — *Courant* reporters sent it swiftly down the drain, unmoved by its less-than-disinterested source, a lawyer named Edward L. Marcus — who happened at the time to be head of the Democratic Party in Connecticut. So annoyed was

the paper by the "diatribes" of the "pugnacious and irascible" tipster that in 1997 it published an editorial addressed directly to him. Citing, among other things, "135 press releases excoriating Mr. Rowland, ranging from the governor's purchase of a vacation cottage in Litchfield to his acceptance of sur-

### CAMERAS RECORDED BOOZE ON THE TABLES AND ON THE DESKS

plus military equipment," the editorial concluded with a reprise of its headline: "Put a sock in it, Ed." Six years later, it was an entirely different story. Following probes by the *Courant* and other news organizations — probes that validated many of Marcus's "diatribes" and then some — Rowland, facing impeachment and federal prosecution, resigned in disgrace in July. "If it weren't for the news media, notably, the *Courant*," wrote Paul Janensch, the paper's "Professor News," in a column that gave a passing nod to the "sock" editorial, "he still would be governor today. I think the beginning of the end came last November, when the *Courant* disclosed that more work was performed on the Rowlands' Bantam Lake vacation cottage than he had paid for."

**DART** to *The Sand Mountain Reporter*, in Albertville, Alabama, for want of a camera with a wide-angle lens. Number of photos of a certain man — at an award ceremony for teachers, handing out plaques; in a house ad for a contest, handing out checks — published on a single day on a single

had happened to be in the building on legislative business and who, Staley was incensed to see, had felt compelled to record his own unforgiving memory of the late president. "Not until the very end of his second term was he even able to utter the word 'AIDS,'" Garcia wrote. "Reagan's silence and his administration's policies contributed to the suffering and dying of thousands of men, women and children." In less time than you can say "unprofessional behavior," the cameraman had informed a security guard of the "defamatory" inscription; the reporter had fingered Garcia; and the guard had scolded the offender for disrespect. As for the station itself, news director Susan Finzen told Miner (with no apparent irony) that Staley "had a right to express her opinion."

**DART** to WICS-TV, in Springfield, Illinois, for leaving a blot on its own memory book. After wrapping up a story about an exhibit of Reagan memorabilia at the state capitol rotunda, Julie Staley, a WICS reporter and longtime Reagan devotee, together with her cameraman, Curt Claycomb, joined the line of those wishing to express their feelings in a public memory book destined for the presidential library. As reported by Michael Miner in the *Chicago Reader*, when Staley's turn came, she scanned the entry signed by the man who had preceded her — one Rick Garcia, a gay rights activist who

**LAUREL** to *The Austin Chronicle*, for unearthing a hidden source of editorial energy that is somewhat less than clean. When William M. Adler, a writer driven by what he calls "an obsession with matters nuclear," came upon an op-ed piece in the *Austin American-Statesman* written by a University of Texas professor promoting the controversial national nuclear waste repository at Nevada's Yucca Mountain, Adler found the

words and the melody so naggingly familiar that he decided to conduct a little experiment. Tracing the elements of that op-ed, and then of others like it, Adler's article in the weekly *Chronicle* documented his findings: a secret process that, since 1978, has put myriad op-eds about various nuclear issues on the editorial pages of the nation's major newspapers. Though signed by university academics with impressive credentials, the pieces originate with a Washington p.r. outfit funded by the nuclear industry lobby. To thwart this "centrally orchestrated plan" to present "the propaganda of one hired atomic gun as the learned musings of disparate academics and other nuclear-industry 'experts,'" Adler suggested in a later article published in *The Washing-*

ton *Post*, editors should ask more questions of their outside contributors before they accept their offerings. Surely it doesn't take a nuclear scientist to do that.

before the gavel came down, the KMSP news team wandered freely through the hallowed halls much like a group of ordinary, civic-minded tourists — except that the cameras they were toting were hidden. And what those cameras recorded was booze — booze on the tables, booze on the desks, booze in the hand, in the air, on the breath. While the voting went on during that three-day lost weekend, KMSP cameras caught legislators, lobbyists, and staff aides drinking, for example, at six different times in the office of the president of the Senate. Confronted with the cameras and all those empty bottles, some of Minnesota's public servants were clearly in denial; others tendered the excuse of oppressive boredom; one issued an apology. A day after the station aired its

## THE PIECES ORIGINATED WITH A WASHINGTON, D.C., LOBBY

ton *Post*, editors should ask more questions of their outside contributors before they accept their offerings. Surely it doesn't take a nuclear scientist to do that.

**LAUREL** to KMSP-TV, in the Twin Cities area, for a sobering exposé. As the clock in Minnesota's capitol building ticked steadily through the final hours of the legislative session in mid-May, and as lawmakers scurried to wrap up the people's business

embarrassing report, Governor Tim Pawlenty, who happened to be signing into law tougher standards on drunken driving, used the occasion to call for a ban on the use of alcohol in all capitol buildings while the legislature is in session. The anonymous lawmakers were quick to agree that Governing Under the Influence of alcohol was not a good idea. (Sadly, the matter of Governing Under the Influence of lobbyists never came up.)

*Darts and Laurels* is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's deputy executive editor, to whom nominations should be addressed: gc15@columbia.edu; 212-854-1887.

## STATE OF THE ART ELECTION 2004: A ROUSING RALLY FOR REFORM

**O**n January 18, *The New York Times* trumpeted the start of this crucial election year with a mighty editorial. Carried under the banner Making Votes Count, the editorial set the course for an old-fashioned newspaper crusade aimed at nothing less than the protection of American democracy against election fraud. In the weeks and months that followed, the crusade joined battle some twenty-two times (as of this August writing), each new engagement yielding revelatory detail on the series' abiding theme: the urgent need for reform that was made so manifest during the trauma of 2000. Intense, unrelenting, but always under the page's characteristic control, Making Votes Count defined and explored the major areas of concern: the absence of voting-machine standards, the ease of mishandling eligible-voter lists, and most worrisome of all, the lack of a paper trail.



Events of the primary season sharpened the series' sword. In Florida, confusion over voter identification ended with many, for the most part members of minority groups, disenfranchised yet again. In California, furor erupted over the malfunction of thousands of voting machines — and over charges of misconduct by their manufacturer, Diebold, whose c.e.o. had famously pledged his commitment to helping reelect Bush. Diebold's conflict of interest, of course, was hardly news to the *Times*: Making Votes Count had targeted it in its opening salvo. The series has also trained its sights on other conflicts of interest that have since emerged in the news, showing little sympathy, for example, for the opposition of such groups as the National Federation of the Blind, whose arguments against a paper trail were not only easily rebutted, but also made suspect by the group's acceptance of a million dollars from the maker of the paperless machines.

But the series has not only drawn on what's been reported in the news. In June it decamped to Las Vegas and returned with a fresh supply of ammunition: a gambling-machine system that is a model of accuracy, reliability, and fairness. "A vote for president," the editorial declared, "should be at least as secure as a 25-cent bet in Las Vegas."

With November fast approaching and too many public officials dragging their feet, the *Times* editorialists, recognizing the limits of reality, began marshaling their forces toward the possible. It's not too late, the series argued indefatigably in July, mapping out the practical strategies that might yet insure the honest election that an American future demands. Even a cynical citizen must at least be heartened by the conviction that the *Times* will fight on until the last vote is counted — and, should history prove it necessary, well beyond.

— Gloria Cooper

## CURRENTS

LONG DAYS  
AHEAD

**E**arlier this year, the Bush administration made the first major revisions to regulations under the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act. In newsrooms, those new rules, which took effect in August, allow managers to claim a larger share of the staff as professional, joining columnists and editorial writers, who do not punch a time card. The National Newspaper Association, representing 2,500 weekly and small daily newspapers, welcomes the flexibility, arguing that the changes will lead to more news coverage. The Newspaper Guild calls the changes oppressive. "Now what happens is reporters will have to work more than forty hours without penalty," says Linda Foley, president of the guild.

The old rules said that since most reporters perform work that is based on diligence and accuracy they are assured overtime pay. Editorial writers, columnists, and critics, in contrast, are exempt from the overtime requirement because their work entails invention.

The new rules still distinguish between routine and creative work. However, most journalists are now classified as "creative professionals," and thus not eligible for overtime.

Some of the revised language is fuzzy, open to different interpretations. For instance, reporters whose work "is subject to substantial control" by their employer can still get OT. So newspapers are likely to apply the rules case by case. The Labor Department, meanwhile, insists newsrooms won't be greatly affected. Stay tuned.

— Jane Gottlieb

*Jane Gottlieb is a freelance writer in Albany, New York.*

## 'MY WRITING IS AN ACT OF COMBAT'

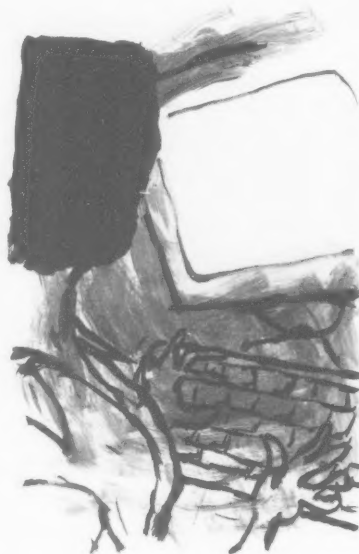
**T**he next time you complain about a tight deadline or late expense check, consider Salima Tlemcani, who has covered civil war and corruption for Algeria's *El Watan* newspaper despite death threats from the GIA, an Islamic militant group. Tlemcani is a pen name, and her identity is secret even from her family. For stories like the account of a war widow struggling to feed twenty-five grandchildren, Tlemcani will receive this year's Courage in Journalism award from the International Women's Media Foundation. This interview was conducted in French and translated by Chase Behringer, a CJR intern.

*How does it feel to keep your identity from your family?*

My family agreed that they could never forgive me if one of them were to die on my account. They wouldn't stop telling me that I was free to make my choice, but that I did not have the right to make it. I could not give up my journalism, and so I was forced to give up my name.

*Are you concerned that the GIA has already killed ten of the twenty-two journalists on its hit list?*

I have learned to live with fear. My only dream and



wish was to be killed by gunfire, and my nightmare was to be captured alive. I can only hope that no journalist knows this daily horror.

*How has reporting on genocide, rape, and other acts of terrorism affected you?*

During the night, images from my stories would pass before my eyes. In the day, these images would make me sick. Often, I am distressed, and frustrate myself for nothing. I became insensitive to the sight of blood and mutilated bodies. The images that continue to

haunt me are those of butchered children and broken women. The assassinations of journalists are difficult to accept, but they reinforce my fight.

*Is your reporting worth your life?*

Writing has helped me form a permanent bond with those who have no voice other than the press. My writing is an act of combat against a regime where women do not have the right to be. I defend an idea, that of a democratic state where there is no place for those who gain their riches on the backs of the people.

(For an extended transcript visit [www.cjr.org/writing-combat.asp](http://www.cjr.org/writing-combat.asp).)

LANGUAGE CORNER  
DISTINCTIONS AND DIFFERENCES

**S**ome distinctions between similar words ought to be maintained because they're useful; examples abound in the Web archives of this fount of wisdom. And here's another: the distinction between "historic" and "historical." In the phrase "Chile, Bolivia's historic enemy," the choice was unfortunate. By hoary consensus, "historic" has been reserved for events of great moment, like the Bat-

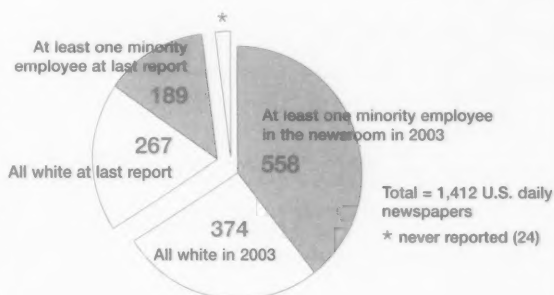
tle of Yorktown or the Emancipation Proclamation. To describe a longtime pattern, like Chilean-Bolivian enmity, or for any variation on the broad notion "relating to history," the job is best done by "historical." Different words for different meanings. Useful.

— Evan Jenkins ([ejenk35@aol.com](mailto:ejenk35@aol.com))

A lot more about writing is in Language Corner at CJR's Web site, [www.cjr.org](http://www.cjr.org).

## WHITE SPACE IN THE NEWSROOM

If you want to work only around white people, try a daily newspaper, where you have a good shot. The American Society of Newspaper Editors surveyed all 1,412 U.S. dailies last year; editors at 374 reported that their newsrooms were entirely white. That doesn't mean the rest are integrated, however. Of the 480 papers that didn't respond, 267 had zero minority employees the last time they did respond. (Some in recent years, some as far back as 1990.) The other 189 who didn't report in 2003 had at least one minority employee earlier. (Twenty-four have never reported to ASNE.) Which means that 45 percent of American dailies — 641 newspapers with a combined circulation of more than 6.3 million — had all-white newsrooms the last time they reported. ASNE's optimistic projections assume that the minority employment of nonresponders "closely resembles" the responders, but CJR's inspection of



past reports shows the nonresponders are usually whiter.

When it comes to integrated papers, a May 2004 analysis of the ASNE data funded by the Knight Foundation ([www.powerreporting.com/knight](http://www.powerreporting.com/knight)) notes that, while the number of minority journalists has increased overall, most papers have employed a higher percentage of minorities in past years. Larger papers tend to hire more journalists of color, the analysis found, while most of the all-white papers have a circulation of 50,000 or fewer. This shouldn't surprise. Small markets

can be particularly unappealing for minority journalists, not only because of the isolation they sometimes feel, but because small papers can't match the recruiting budgets enjoyed by big metro dailies. Still, 102 papers under 50,000 circulation have reached parity with their communities — meaning there are only as many whites inside the newsroom as there are outside, in percentage terms. Ultimately, integrated papers of all sizes seem to share one thing: a committed management.

—Corey Pein

## WHEN WE COULD SEE THE COFFINS

Meyer Berger in *The New York Times*, October 27, 1947

The first war dead from Europe came home yesterday. The harbor was steeped in Sabbath stillness as they came in on the morning tide in 6,248 coffins in the hold of the transport *Joseph V. Connolly*. One coffin, borne from the ship in a caisson, moved through the city's streets to muffled drumbeats and slow cadenced marches, and 400,000 New Yorkers along the route and at a memorial service in Central Park paid it the tribute of reverent silence and unhidden tears.

At the service on the Sheep Meadow, chaplains of three faiths prayed for the soldier dead. Their words, and the choking sadness of taps, suspended in quivering, unseasonal heat, evoked women's sobs and caught at men's throats.

The transport *Joseph V. Connolly* broke through



the haze outside the Narrows at 9 A.M., a shadowy hulk all gray and tan, with a funeral wreath at her forepeak. Nothing moved on her decks . . .

The Connolly's escort wheeled into line — the destroyers *Bristol* and *Beaty*; the gleaming white coast-guard cutter *Spencer*; five of the city's fireboats and other small craft. The ship's ensign, half-masted, stirred in the wind, and at 9:15 A.M. foam flowed from the *Connolly's* prow and the craft moved toward the harbor.

The pace was slow, a bare ten knots. Buoys tolled and lapsed into quiet. There was a stir on the *Bristol's* fantail, and Corporal Carroll Ripley, a marine, raised his trumpet and Church Call, muted and tender, hung over the waters. Rear Admiral John J. Brady, retired, opened a prayer: "O, God —" but a wind tore the invocation to tatters.

## HARD NUMBERS

**1 in 3:** Odds that if the word "propaganda" was mentioned on a network news broadcast since June, it referred to *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

**1 in 7:** Odds that it referred to insurgents in Iraq.

**0.02:** Percent of Viacom's 2003 revenue consumed by the \$550,000 FCC fine for broadcasting Janet Jackson's nipple last halftime of the Super Bowl.

**\$7.5 billion:** Amount spent in 2003 by the federal government and its contractors to make information "classified."

**\$323 million:** Amount federal agencies spent in 2003 processing FOIA requests.

**\$7 million:** Expected 2004 income from campaign ads at ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox stations in Toledo, Ohio.

**\$1 million, \$0:** Amount donated by the chairman of Univision, the largest U.S. Spanish-language broadcaster, to George Bush's and John Kerry's campaigns, respectively.

**2 to 1:** Ratio of Latino voters who support John Kerry to those who support George Bush, according to a poll by *The Washington Post* and Univision.

Sources: Lexis/Nexis, CNNmoney, National Archives, Washington Post, CJR research.

## SOUND BITE

**'Recognize that many reporters have numerical literacy problems.'**

—Advice to readers of *Public Relations Tactics*, published by the Public Relations Society of America, in its May 2004 issue.



on the job

# MY LAPTOP, MY LIFE

A reporter feels the wrath of the information age, where everything is just a click away ...until it isn't

BY DAVID M. HALBFINGER

I left my life in a taxicab, and I don't think I'm ever going to get it back.

I'm exaggerating, slightly. What I actually lost was my laptop. But what it contained was irreplaceable, and what it meant to me is immeasurable. I have been on the road, covering the presidential campaign, since August 2003. This job is a jealous master — even on my brief visits home, my wife, enduring this trying first year of marriage by clinging to my promises of much better after November, has to pull me away from my laptop to eat or sleep. (I learned the hard way to mute the computer so the e-mail chimes don't ring through our barely furnished home.)

On the road, my laptop was my connection to her. When I powered up, she would stare out at me, smiling a full-screen come-hither smile as she lay in her wedding gown in our bridal suite. During the day, we would speak more through e-mail than phone. My laptop was my connection to everyone: bosses, friends, sources, family. It held my only pictures of my nephews with their ailing great-grandparents; pictures from our campaign-shortened honeymoon; pictures from the campaign trail

that I hoped to show my friends when it was all over and I got my life back.

My mother just sold my childhood home, severing one of my few remaining ties to anything with any permanence, and yet that computer, with its gold mine of addresses and correspondence and pictures, held for me the promise of a future permanence, somewhere, someday.

It would preserve me and my identity, so long as I preserved it.

It was my link to the past, too. A few years ago, I spent months interviewing my late grandmother — the font of our family history — in the day room of her nursing home, showing her crumbling nineteenth-century photographs and furiously typing up her stories.

Someday I hoped to flesh it out into something more meaningful than a family tree. (I may have once backed up some of that, I think, but I don't know where.)

And of course, it was my office. The hundreds of interviews and speeches I'd digitally recorded since October? Gone. The 350 campaign sources I developed and carefully typed into my address book? Gone, along with their work, home, and cell-phone numbers and e-mail addresses. When I first lost the computer, I consoled myself with the knowledge that I had put all those names and numbers on my handheld (for the first time in weeks) the very night before. But that backup, it turned out, suffered a glitch. All was lost. It has meant that I've had to continually go hat-in-hand to my colleagues for numbers, and although I've managed to avoid any catastrophic



JASON GREENBERG



disruption in my coverage, I have doubtless suffered a loss of context and perspective, namely the ability to go back and check my memories against the recordings and notes I'd amassed.

"You'll get it back," other reporters kept saying hopefully. But I kept noticing their facial expressions: hands over mouths. Grimaces. The kinds of looks that cannot be faked. I have become a walking cautionary tale.

The strangest thing is how blurry my memory is of losing it. Even when I first realized I'd lost the laptop — an hour after I got out of a cab in Brookline, Massachusetts, to see an old friend on a rare morning off — I could not quite be sure where I had left it. I went back inside my friend's house, but the computer was not there. So I took a cab back to the hotel, hoping I'd simply forgotten to take it with me.

The panic I felt was too familiar. Covering a campaign is at least half a test of patience, endurance, and multitasking, and someone leaves something behind nearly every day. What with the packing while half asleep in strange hotels at ungodly hours, the constant movement from planes to buses, and the ceaseless distractions from a dozen directions, I've lost my cell phone four times, a handheld once, and frequently mislaid the electronic security card without which I cannot communicate with the newspaper. I even once left my laptop behind after covering a speech.

I replaced my cell phone twice and found it twice. The other items always caught up to me again. This time, I fear, my luck has run out.

All I had to go on was a blank receipt showing the cab company's name and number. But I've put up signs in its garage, persuaded the dispatchers to announce my offer of a big reward, checked with the police lost-and-found desk, and gotten my hotel to check its security videotapes to try to spot my cab number. Nothing has come of it.

**W**ho walks off with a banged-up laptop and keeps it? I ask myself. It has a cracked frame from being dropped on too many tarmacs. Some of the keys barely work. I'd already gotten a replacement and was just waiting for a chance to switch my files over. What kind of person would see the photo of my beautiful wife and not take pity on her husband?

But I also ask myself, Who doesn't take better care of such precious data?

A few weeks after the loss, my wife and I grabbed a rare night in the same city — we shared a room in a hotel in Times Square. The next morning she asked me to check under the bed. I didn't bother. She did, and found a wallet containing \$970 and a California doctor's driver's license and credit cards.

We reached the doctor at his home — he had reported it lost two weeks earlier, a stunning comment on the hotel's cleaning and security staff — and we overnighted his wallet to him. He called the next day to say we had renewed his "faith in mankind."

I'm here, if anyone wants to do the same for me. I promise to back up my files every night. ■

*David M. Halbfinger, the Atlanta bureau chief of The New York Times, is covering John Kerry's presidential campaign.*

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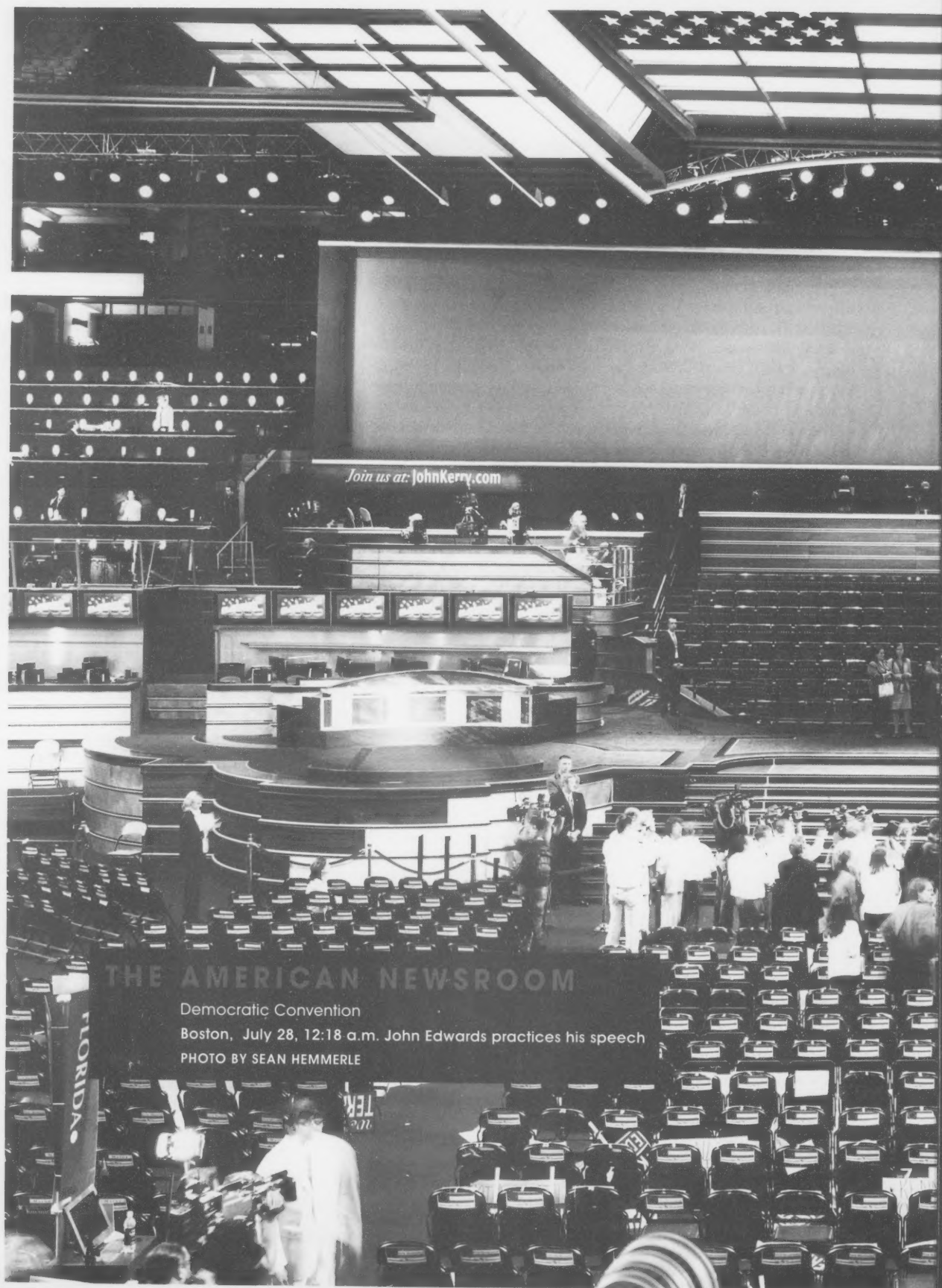
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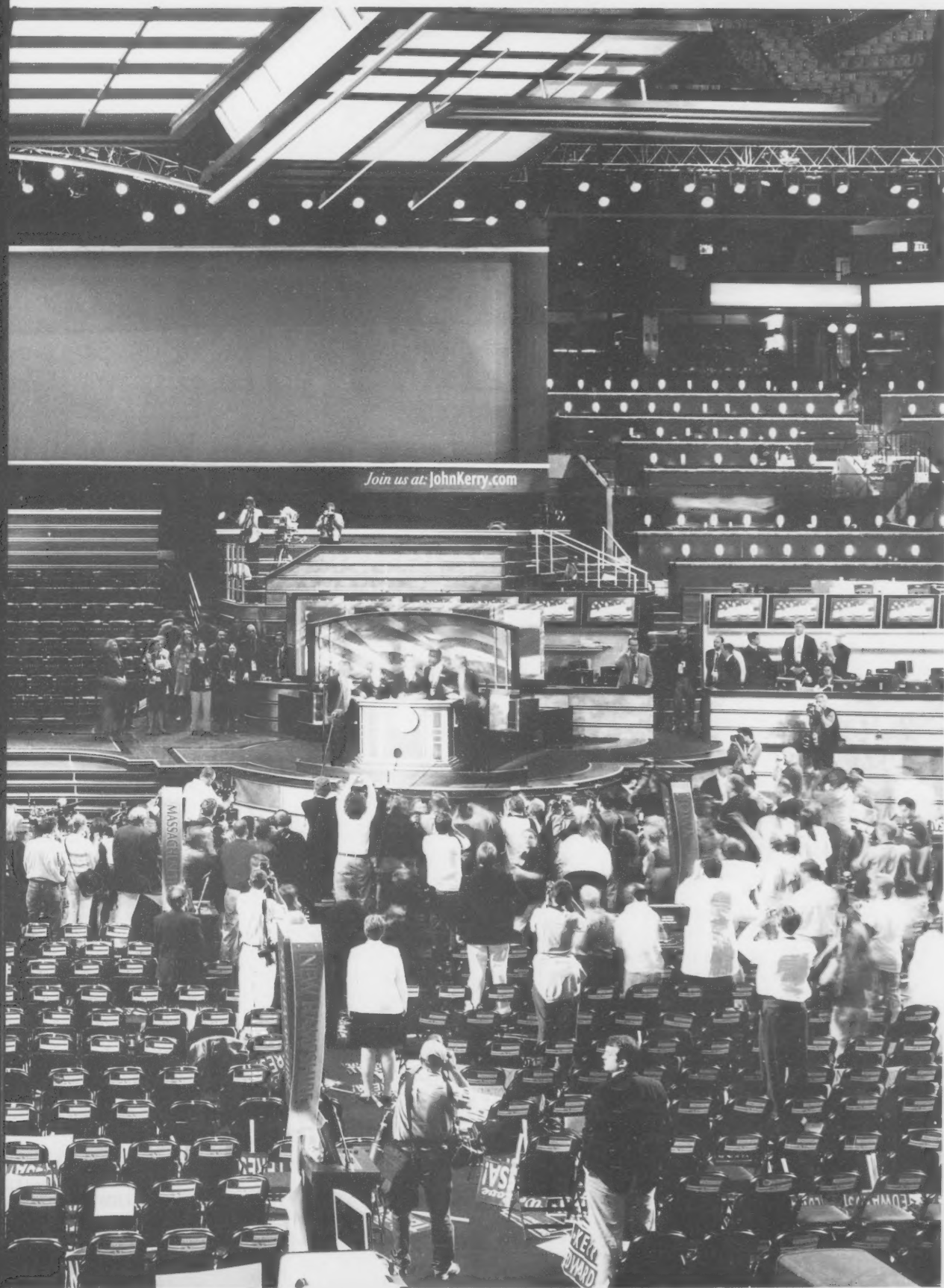


## THE AMERICAN NEWSROOM

Democratic Convention

Boston, July 28, 12:18 a.m. John Edwards practices his speech

PHOTO BY SEAN HEMMERLE



## THE STATE OF THE BEAT

Homeland Security:  
What We Don't Know Can Hurt Us

## IMAGINING EVIL

BY TRUDY LIEBERMAN

"The most important failure was one of imagination."  
— *Report of the 9/11 Commission*

It could happen, and some are certain that it will: another catastrophic attack on an American city, another day of horror and heartbreak. The raw scenes would be carried live on national television, and the media would rise to the occasion, as they did after the airplanes hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Television would focus its lens on nothing else; newspapers and magazines would begin work on amazing packages that, in time, would begin to piece together just how the security of the homeland had again been breached. Commissions would be convened, and we'd cover every word. We would begin to hear from our colleagues echoes of things that were written and said in the aftermath of the first attack, on 9/11, as we once again declared that the age of fluff and celebrity was over.

But what about now, before such an attack? What, exactly, is being done to prevent one? Three-quarters of Americans say they are satisfied that the government is doing a good job of protecting them from terrorists. But do they really know? Billions of dollars have been spent, vast quantities of data that were once part of the public record have vanished, reams of new regulations have been written, and the largest reorganization of the federal government in half a century has taken place — all in the name of defending the homeland. It's quite a story, and for a few months after 9/11, the media were filled with articles about homeland security just as they have been filled lately with stories about terror alerts.

Yet extensive and specific searches by CJR show that

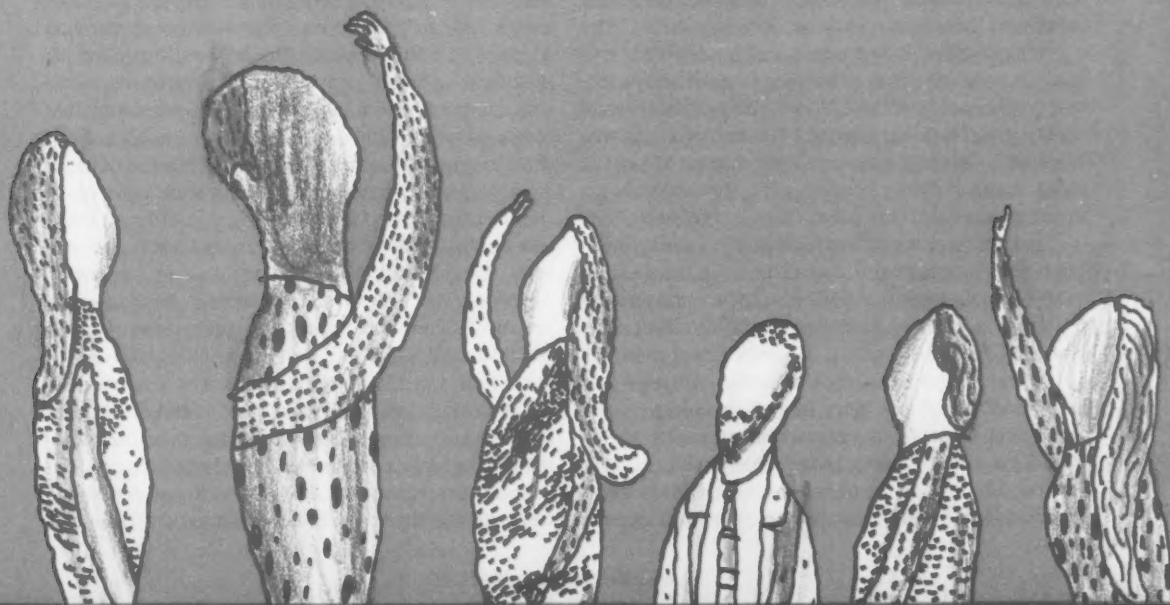
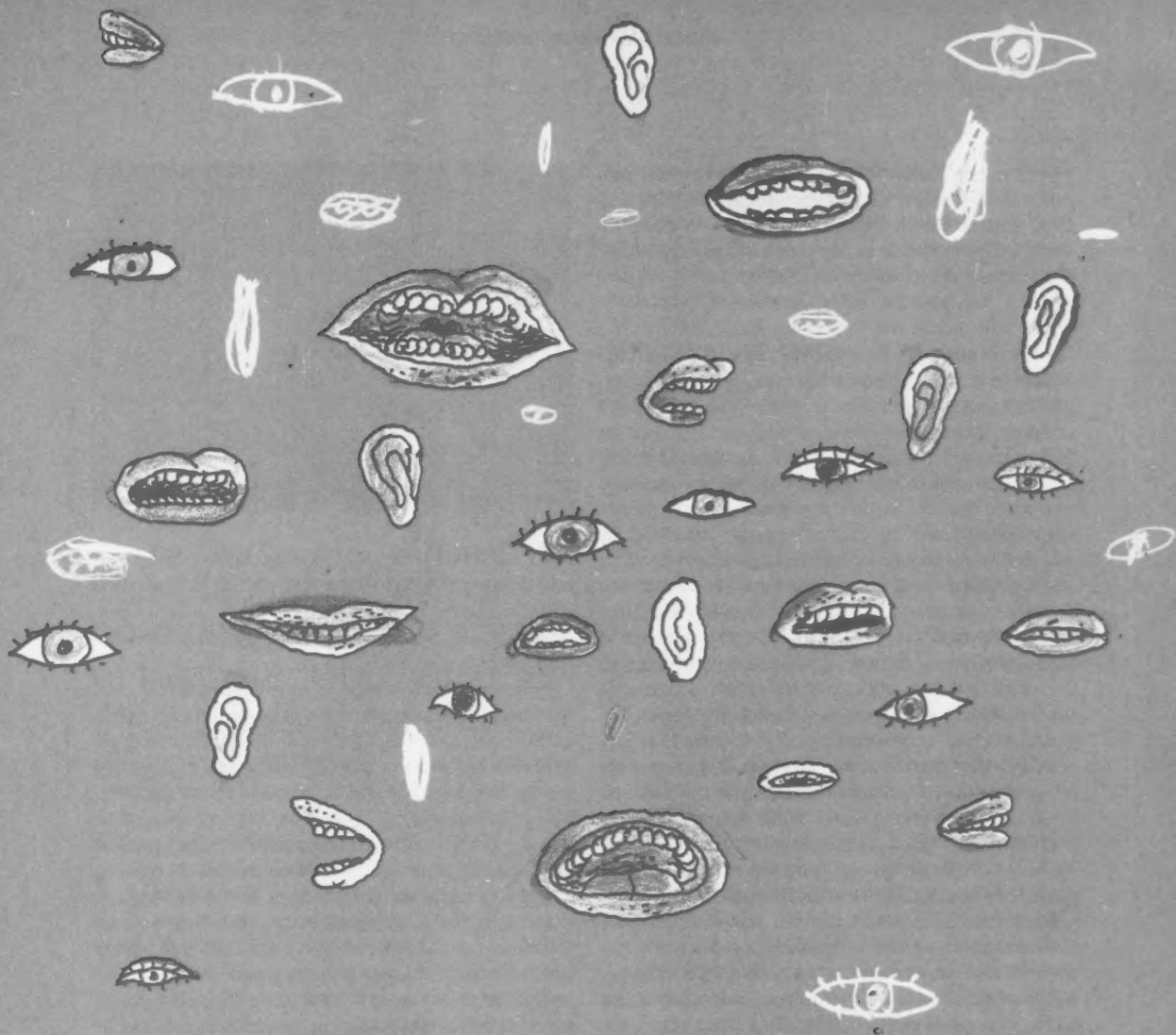
over the last couple of years, coverage of the effort to prevent another 9/11 has been spotty, episodic, reactive, and shallow. The strong stories we did find are the exceptions that prove the rule, and they more than demonstrate the need for a continuing and critical assessment of whether the government's policies and practices actually match their stated purpose of safeguarding America.

While some news outlets assign reporters to cover the Department of Homeland Security, few do it full-time and none cover all twenty-two agencies that make up its bureaucracy. News bureaus give it short shrift, as they do most federal agencies. Yet homeland security is not only a Washington story. It's a national, state, and local story all at once. It's about the ports, the railroads, the airlines, the utility plants, the food supply, communications — the guts of America. It's about the records at your doctor's office and restrictions on our civil liberties. It's about the rules placed on businesses and expanding markets for big corporations and little start-ups selling baggage scanners and bomb-sniffing technology. It is a beat for those willing to dig along the underlying fault line that has opened since 9/11: the public's right to know versus their most basic need for safety.

Given that the universe of homeland security is so expansive and diffuse, that it is wrapped in secrecy and muffled in bureaucracy, it is not surprising that journalists have had a hard time embracing what is a monster of a beat. Still, considering the significance of the subject — it is hard to think of a more important one — it follows that editors and reporters should be eager to try. If the government's prime objective is protecting its people, ours should be making sure it

HENRIK DRESCHER







carries out that task. Why haven't we done that? One reason is that media companies have consistently dictated cuts to the newsgathering budget to make investors happy; hard, slow digging costs money.

But there's more to it than that.

"This isn't just any story," points out Dr. Tara O'Toole, who heads the Center for Biosecurity at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. "We are in a whole new era, the end of American hegemony, in which we are vulnerable to attack. And that makes people very uncomfortable."

It is also a story that demands imagination. Journalists like to report on happenings, not on question marks; the specificity of an event allows us to report with authority and some semblance of objectivity. In the months preceding the war in Iraq, for example, few stories tried to look forward to what would happen after the invasion ended and the occupation began. Yet high-quality material for such speculative but informed stories was out there, in think tanks and reports and in the minds of dozens of experts. James Fallows is one of the few writers who found and used them, for his celebrated November 2002 piece in *The Atlantic Monthly*, "The Fifty-first State?" which explored likely scenarios for postwar Iraq. On the homeland security front, one of the few reporters to do something similar was Matthew Brzezinski, a contributing writer for *The New York Times Magazine*, who wrote a well-reported piece in February 2003 about how day-to-day life might change if the U.S. moved to "total terrorist preparedness." Much of Brzezinski's reporting was done in Israel, a nation that knows something about that condition.

Since homeland security stories are essentially about what we hope does not happen, they often require us to game out probabilities and possibilities, most of them dire. And we resist. "Editors sometimes see homeland security as 'henny penny the sky is falling' stories," says a prominent Washington reporter who covers homeland security for a major newspaper. "Like 'the American ports could be attacked.' They get tired of the possibility that this could happen." This reporter says that homeland security coverage is a step removed from the more dramatic work of covering terrorism. "It's analyzing in an antiseptic way what a terrorist might do."

The Department of Homeland Security itself, meanwhile, is the most secretive of agencies in the most secretive of administrations. When a CJR intern asked for the exact number of terrorist warnings to the public since 2002, a p.r. person at the department, who declined to give her full name, said the information was "classified." The department, housed in a former naval facility on Nebraska Avenue miles from downtown Washington, has the aura of an impenetrable fortress. And for most reporters there's no advantage in hanging around. "All you get are p.r. people. If you want to

get a policy person, it's near impossible," says Sean Moulton, a senior policy analyst at OMB Watch, a public-interest group that promotes government accountability. Some information, of course, must be kept out of the public domain. There is no need to provide a tip sheet for the terrorists. But simply trusting the department to make the decisions about what the public gets to know is not merely naïve, but dangerous.

This is especially true when we consider what the government tries to keep secret, and when we consider some of the strong reporting that journalists *have* managed to do in the months since 9/11, the solid stories that demonstrate the possibility and significance of the beat. Two examples:

**AIR CARGO** Last May in Indianapolis, the I-Team investigators at WISH-TV presented their viewers with a frightening bit of news: the belly of an ordinary passenger plane carries commercial cargo that probably has never been screened.

Using government reports, interviews with air safety experts, and their own test of packages containing questionable items that they sent through the mail on airplanes, reporters at the CBS affiliate documented a gaping hole in air safety. They showed that federal legislation passed after 9/11 required the screening of all mail and cargo carried on commercial passenger jets — cargo that could carry explosives, dirty bombs, or deadly biological agents. But they then used the government's own investigations to show that those screening procedures had never been put into effect, largely because of industry resistance.

The team's revelations made something of a mockery of the elaborate screening procedures that passengers endure at the nation's 445 commercial airports. Yet WISH-TV's six-part series on air-cargo safety, which began with an anonymous tip, is a rarity. CJR searched for stories on air-cargo safety in the mainstream media, including national and regional newspapers, news magazines, and major broadcast outlets, and found that although news outlets mentioned the problem from time to time, they often did so in the context of other stories. *Time* magazine, for example, ran a survey of homeland security vulnerabilities in its August 2 edition, in the wake of the 9/11 commission report; the part about air cargo was limited to a single sentence.

In June, WISH-TV saw an opportunity to show viewers the difference between the security talk and the political walk, and followed up on the story. That month the U.S. House of Representatives defeated — by a vote of 211 to 191 — a bill that would finally have ensured inspection of all cargo shipped on passenger planes. The station reported that Indiana's House delegation voted against the bill, and included comments from one member, who had earlier told the I-Team that

SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES



## The effect of decisions on profits is a major part of the beat: 'You could say that homeland security is all about money'

he found unchecked cargo "troubling." The point was to show that politicians said one thing, then turned around and did another because of industry lobbying, says producer Loni McKown. The air-cargo industry claims that meticulous checking would slow the system down too much, and that appropriate technology is not available, a point WISH-TV showed is in dispute.

In fact, the economic interests of the powerful air-cargo industry, which helped defeat the June bill and has thwarted the congressional mandate of 2001, are seriously undercovered. For example, the Associated Press in its story about the defeat of the bill briefly noted that the cargo industry helped sink it. The piece, a wrap-up story about other homeland security spending legislation, was picked up by just a few papers, including *USA Today*, and papers in Houston, Charleston, West Virginia, Grand Rapids, Seattle, and Milwaukee. *The Washington Post* did its own version, but it's a good bet that most air travelers still do not know that one-quarter of the nation's air cargo is flying with them, and that almost none of it has passed through a screening machine.

There is plenty more they don't know about air safety. They may not know, for example, that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which is responsible for examining passenger baggage, sometimes puts the airlines' need to keep passengers moving above passengers' need for a safe journey — a point *Mother Jones* and *The Seattle Times* both made in July. The pub-

lications took a rare look at the contradictions that abound even in passenger screening. *The Seattle Times* found that in its hometown, airlines loaded unscreened baggage onto planes. *Mother Jones* reported that when two men who trained TSA screeners raised questions about unscreened luggage, they lost their jobs.

**CHEMICAL PLANTS** In the months after 9/11, Carl Prine, a reporter for the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, owned by the conservative philanthropist Richard Mellon Scaife, walked into sixty-two chemical plants in Baltimore, Chicago, Houston, and Pittsburgh. He found lax security; easy access to sites; unguarded rail lines; and employees, customers, and neighbors who allowed a stranger to walk in, some giving directions, to the most sensitive valves and control rooms in the place. At one steel plant, near Pittsburgh, mill workers tipped their hats to Prine as he wandered "toward 100,000 pounds of acid that could kill, injure, trap, or displace 16,000 people" living within a mile of the plant.

The paper continued with coverage of the lobbying efforts of the American Chemistry Council, an industry trade group, to defeat legislation that would require stronger security at the nation's 15,000 chemical plants. That legislation, championed by Senator Jon Corzin of New Jersey, remains stalled.

Those stories stand as a model of dogged reporting for the rest of the press. Says Steven Aftergood, a senior research analyst at the Federation of American Scientists: "Chemical plant security has been inadequately reported. Chances are that wherever you are, there's a call for journalistic oversight of your local facility." After 9/11, and in 2002 and 2003, many media outlets did briefly note that chemical plants might be vulnerable, and some mentioned Corzine's mission to make them safer. But none came close to rivaling the Pittsburgh stories for thoroughness, enterprise, and insight.

By 2004 most of the press seemed to lose interest. Much of this year's coverage of the subject has centered on an address by John Kerry to the National Conference of Black Mayors, accusing the Bush administration of leaving chemical plants open to attack. Even when the General Accounting Office released a second report in February reiterating the same points it made a year earlier — about plant vulnerability and the inadequacy of a voluntary approach to security — only a handful of papers saw this as news.

One bright exception, though, was a *60 Minutes* investigation, first aired last November, in which reporters followed Prine's map and visited dozens of chemical sites across the country. They found the same kind of security lapses that Prine had found two years earlier, including unlocked gates, dilapidated fences, and unprotected tanks filled with deadly

chemicals. *60 Minutes* noted the same legislative barriers to greater security that Prine had written about. The segment ran again in June, after which correspondent Steve Kroft pointed out that almost nothing had changed — including the lobbying by the chemical industry to defeat Corzine's bill.

“**Y**ou could say that homeland security is all about money,” says Jeff Stein, who edits *Homeland Security*, an online newsletter published by *Congressional Quarterly*. The press, for the most part, has yet to delve into the connection between decisions about homeland security and the profits or losses that flow from those decisions.

Consider Project BioShield, which President Bush announced in his 2003 State of the Union address. The program sets aside \$5.6 billion over ten years to develop a new generation of drugs to fight anthrax, smallpox, botulinum toxin, and other agents that could be used in a terrorist attack. As an incentive for biotechnology firms to invest in costly research and development, the government guarantees a market for the new drugs. “We must assume that our enemies would use these diseases as weapons, and we must act before the dangers are upon us,” Bush said in his speech. Few would argue with that premise.

But the press has not put Project BioShield under a microscope. Although several stories have mentioned the program, they haven't probed its costs and benefits. Some seemed to parrot the administration's enthusiasm for a pet project. In one news story in 2003, *USA Today* flatly asserted: “The need for bioterrorism drugs and vaccines is great. Botulinum toxin, for instance, is one of Saddam Hussein's major bioweapons.” But the media have not yet asked basic questions about the program's effectiveness, its cost, and its long-term wisdom, given other health-system problems, such as a crumbling public health infrastructure. Merrill Goozner, a former journalist who recently joined the Center for Science in the Public Interest, raised such issues in a story that appeared last fall in *The American Prospect*. Yet even in July, when the president signed Project BioShield into law, the project remained largely unexplored.

Another undercovered money story: what is happening to the money doled out for “first responders?” After 9/11, people inside and outside government recognized the need to bolster the capabilities of the police, firefighters, emergency workers, and public health officials who are the first responders when disaster strikes. The government addressed the problem by shoveling huge sums of money toward the nooks and crannies of America. From 1999 to 2003 funding for first responders increased 2,375 percent; by 2003

the federal treasury was ponying up more than \$2 billion for local jurisdictions to buy equipment, pay for training, and conduct preparedness exercises.

But curiously, much of that money has not been used, according to a recent report by the Homeland Security department's own auditor. The report offered some puzzling statistics: as of February 2004, fifty-six states and territories had drawn down only 36 percent of the 2002 grant money and 23 percent of the 2003 money. For 2002, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, and Wyoming had not used any of the money. For 2003, that list included Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Illinois, New Mexico, and South Dakota.

*Homeland Security Funding Report*, a newsletter published by CD Publications, ran several stories showing how the money is often caught in a labyrinth of paperwork that almost guarantees that it doesn't flow easily. Yet CJR found very few stories published or aired in those states that had not spent their chunk of the first-responder money.

*The Buffalo News* is one news outlet that did examine the slow spending in its region, in a 1,500-word piece that also looked at the other side of the ledger — some of the oddities of what was purchased with money that authorities did manage to spend. Among the paper's findings: the administration of Governor George Pataki had sent 1,800 escape masks to Erie and Niagara Counties, which weighed ten pounds each and contained five minutes worth of oxygen. The paper noted that a spokesman for the state Task Force on Weapons of Mass Destruction declined to discuss any aspect of the procurement.

Yet in general we have been slow to follow up on leads about homeland security that should spark reportorial interest, including leads from the government itself. Take, for example, the Justice Department's announcement in early May that the government's use of secret warrants to monitor suspected terrorists had increased sharply in 2003. The Justice Department said it had sought more than 1,700 warrants — an increase of 500 over 2002 — from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, the secret court that oversees terrorist and espionage cases. Law enforcement officials are held to a lower standard of proof in seeking these warrants than in regular criminal cases. Yet only four major newspapers ran news stories about the increase, which civil liberties advocates see as an alarming trend, and one ran an editorial.

Even when leads are followed up, the going is tough. For those who are trying to do serious reporting on homeland security, a freeze on unclassified information has altered the landscape. At the Environmental Protection Agency, for instance, citizens can no longer view

environmental impact studies for chemical plants. Risk-management plans submitted by companies to the government, which detail disaster preparedness, have disappeared from government Web sites.

And the "sensitive security information" provision tucked into the Homeland Security Act, which agencies are just now beginning to define, may well erect a larger barrier to reporting. This provision, intended to make it easier for state and local officials to share information about the risk of attacks on vulnerable infrastructure, requires all those receiving the information to sign nondisclosure agreements; violations may result in heavy fines. What state official will violate such an agreement? The not unreasonable fear is that the definition of "sensitive" will be so broad that the public may never learn whether, say, their water supply is at risk. While one can argue that such a provision keeps terrorists from learning about security loopholes, the counterargument is that it keeps government and industry immune from pressure to do something about the dangers. Journalists can't expose the problem, and the community can't agitate for change. Take something as simple as learning about a city's disaster preparedness plan. "I can tell you I made a custom mass dispensing model [for antibiotics], but not anything about the model," says Dr. Nathaniel Hupert, an assistant professor of public health at the Weill Medical College of Cornell University. "Any time I'm asked about New York City's preparedness, I refer people to the Department of Health."

Buried in the Homeland Security Act is yet another obscure provision dealing with "critical infrastructure information." This gives businesses protection from civil lawsuits and protec-

tion from the prying eyes of reporters in exchange for providing the government with data about their plants, communications systems, and the like that could be open to an attack. If, say, a company that built a bridge has reason to believe the cables will snap, the firm can come forward and share those concerns with the government. But the provision forbids the government from using that information in any regulatory action or disclosing it to the media. It is also exempt from Freedom of Information Act requirements. At the Federal Energy Regulatory Com-

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Priority will be given to projects otherwise unlikely to be undertaken or completed, focusing on issues that have not been reported or are under-reported, and which have a high likelihood of being published/aired and of reaching a mass audience. To be eligible, journalists must be U.S. citizens and/or work for a U.S. accredited news organization. Applicants must submit a brief summary of their project; a budget outline and estimated timeframe; a resume; examples of recent work; and letters of support from a supervising editor/news director. **The application deadline is Friday, October 22, 2004.** Awards will be announced in early 2005.

### **Kaiser Mini-Fellowships Selection Committee:**

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mission, for example, reporters cannot easily obtain critical infrastructure information about liquefied natural gas plants or hydroelectric dams. The agency still has its electronic library but has made the process for obtaining data far more onerous. Those trying to access the information, for instance, must prove they have need for it, and may be asked to sign a nondisclosure statement. What reporter would sign one?

Some journalists and public-interest advocates believe that this information shutdown is as much about helping big business get its way with government regulators as it is about thwarting terrorists. "A lot of industries are using the fear of terrorism and the homeland security mandate as a way of getting goodies they've been unable to get legally for years," says Joseph Davis, a former reporter for *Congressional Quarterly* and director of the Watchdog Project for the Society of Environmental Journalists. "This needs to be reported."

## The attack on information is 'one of the biggest stories of our lifetime. The public's oversight is being eviscerated'

Secrecy, no matter its rationale, makes it harder for news organizations to do their job. Earlier this year the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* was working on a story about \$10 million worth of tax breaks that the city of Roanoke, twenty miles northeast of Fort Worth, had given Citibank to build a large data-processing facility. The paper planned to run a map showing where the access roads and the building would be — basic information it thought residents of this tiny town, population 4,650, might want about a big new employer. But the city refused to give the paper the documents it needed and referred the matter to the Texas attorney general. The reason? The paper's request fell within the critical-infrastructure-information provisions of the Texas Homeland Security Act. The attorney general bought Citibank's argument that a terrorist attack on its processing center "could severely impact the company's business operations, and, in turn, cause enduring economic damage to the country's economic system." Editors thought the argument was a stretch, and the paper published stories about its fight with Texas officials. In the end the paper ran a story describing the intersection where the building was to be built, but no map.

The government's attack on information is "one of the biggest stories of our lifetime," says Lucy Dalglish,

who heads the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. "The public's ability to exercise oversight of government operations is being eviscerated." Stories that tell of that threat, she added, are few and far between.

At the heart of the media's hesitation about homeland security may be fear of confronting the government. "We in the press were slow to find the line where secrecy is legitimate and where disclosure is imperative," admits Andy Alexander, Washington bureau chief for Cox Newspapers and chair of the Freedom of Information Committee for the American Society of Newspaper Editors. "We were slow to get to the point where information was being shut down."

Indeed. Consider the story of James McNeil, a government contractor, who in November gave public, unclassified testimony to the House Government Reform Committee. McNeil described how an undercover agent of the Transportation Security Administration had smuggled small handguns past airport screeners in Rochester, New York, by taping them to their thighs with Ace bandages and claiming he had just had surgery. In February the TSA demanded that McNeil's testimony be expunged from the public record, arguing that it included "sensitive security information." The TSA asked the House committee to post a redacted version and asked the Federal Document Clearing House, which provides transcripts of hearings to news organizations, to remove the testimony from its media archives. Both complied.

The Clearing House then asked its customers to delete McNeil's prepared statement. *Congressional Quarterly* refused to delete the testimony from its Web site, and its newsletter, *Homeland Security*, told its 1,200 subscribers about the demand. Yet mainstream media did not tell their readers and viewers, who number in the millions. "The idea that the public record can be retroactively modified is appalling," says Steven Aftergood, of the Federation of American Scientists. But CJR found no editorial comment about this, and the only news stories on the subject appeared in the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* and *The Washington Post*.

Contrast media response to such demands for secrecy with the outrage expressed by librarians over provisions in the Patriot Act. The law allows FBI agents to seek permission from the secret court set up under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act to obtain personal records ranging from data on a patron's reading habits and use of the Internet to medical histories and bookstore purchases. Librarians participated in rallies, challenging Attorney General John Ashcroft when his road show promoting the Patriot Act came to some towns in the summer of 2003. They expect to collect one million signatures by the end of September to support amending the act.



This from *librarians*. Where are the journalists? A fundamental tenet of the American system is that a free flow of information is essential to democracy. That flow is being pinched like never before. Instead of passively standing by, journalism should be working against this dangerous trend.

A new effort that may fire up the media is the Coalition of Journalists for Open Government, formed at the beginning of the year with a grant from the Knight Foundation. Its twenty-seven members include the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the Radio-Television News Directors Association & Foundation, and the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. The group has begun to speak out, and recently offered strong testimony to the Department of Transportation and the Transportation Security Administration about regulations and review procedures regarding sensitive security information. Such lobbying activities are not universally popular among journalists and publishers. "There's a reluctance to see this as the priority it used to be," says the AP's president, Tom Curley, who has called for a battle plan to strengthen statutory guarantees of access to government records. Curley sees many reasons for the re-

luctance, ranging from the time it takes to get the right decisions on a First Amendment case to worries about declining audiences. "Are they afraid they don't have the public's support?" he asks.

But the public, we are willing to bet, would indeed like to know that terrorists can tape guns to their legs and climb aboard airplanes; that airplanes fly with a hold full of uninspected cargo; that ships bring in some 7 million containers to America each year, and only a fraction are ever inspected; that security at chemical plants and other dangerous sites is porous. The public surely would like to know if the government is really trying to close such loopholes in homeland security. And if we make our case well and report forthrightly on the homeland security beat, the public just might want to make certain that we have the tools we need to hold the government accountable. The public's right to know is central to what we do. If we don't believe that, we are in the wrong profession. ■

*Trudy Lieberman is a contributing editor to CJR. She received research help on this story from the magazine's interns, Chase Behringer and Hali Felt. This article is the first in a series called The State of the Beat.*

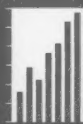
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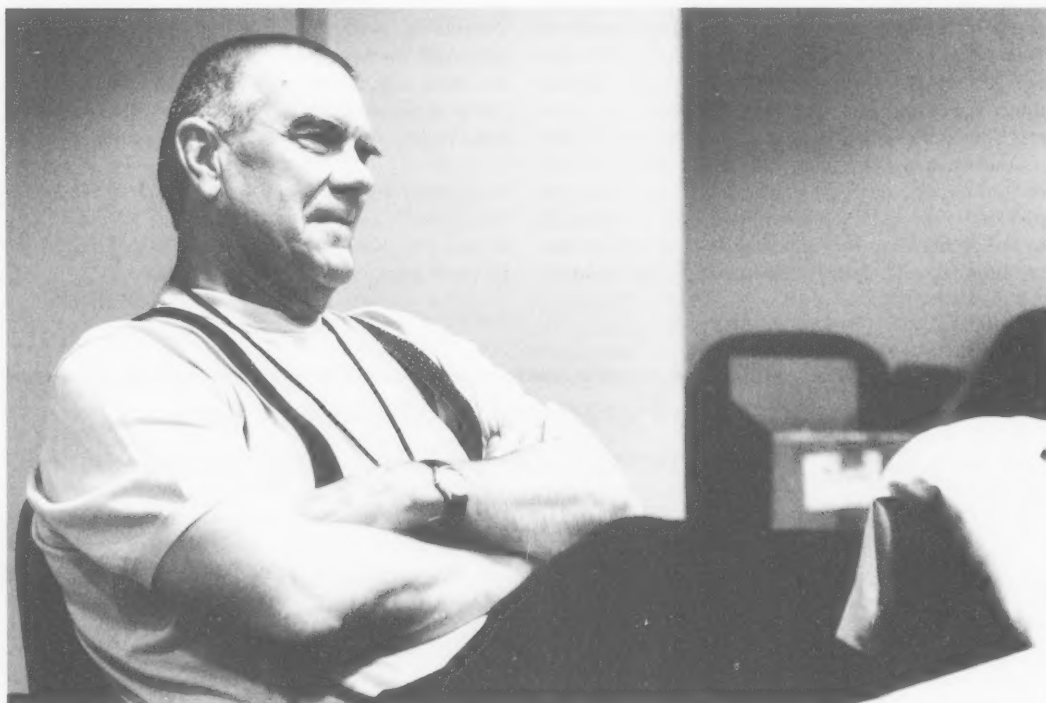
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JOURNALISM AND JESUS

The World Journalism Institute wants to save  
our newsrooms, one reporter at a time

## GOD IS MY CO-AUTHOR



JOSE MINER

BY GAL BECKERMAN

Robert Case II, who directs the World Journalism Institute, thinks that more evangelicals in the mainstream media will be a boon to both, breaking the evangelicals free from their social "ghetto" and returning Christian sensibilities to the newsroom

Okay, maybe the sound of prayer issuing from a journalist's mouth is not so bizarre — what reporter on deadline hasn't beseeched a higher power? But this was different: in a bland khaki-colored room deep in the bowels of the Empire State Building, fifteen aspiring journalists sat in front of their laptops with their heads bowed. "Thank you, Lord, for loving journalism," intoned the morning's instructor, an AP reporter who would soon give a lesson on constructing leads. "Thank you, Lord, for cherishing words, for loving good, clear writing."

They were all evangelical college students taking part in a month-long summer seminar of the World Journalism Institute, a J-school with a mission to prepare young evangelicals to enter the mainstream media universe.

The students, here in New York from as far away as Lookout Mountain, Georgia (population: 1,581) and schools like Vision Bible College in

Marsing, Idaho, are mostly in their early twenties, clean cut, earnest, and deeply religious. They laugh at the notion that they are a cadre of religious zealots being trained to infiltrate the newsroom and violate the sacred doctrine of dispassionate, objective journalism. Yet the students themselves aren't entirely clear just how the journalistic and spiritual parts of their identity fit together. Are they evangelical journalists, or just journalists who happen to be evangelicals?

Robert Case II, who directs the program, has his own answers to these questions. A former philosophy teacher at Central Washington University, in 1997 he was on the board of God's World Publications, a publisher of evangelical newsletters and books, and helped conceive of, as he puts it, "a boot camp for aspiring journalists of faith." The institute opened in 1999, and the next year Case moved from Washington State to Asheville, North Carolina, to run it.

Case is a charismatic man with a football player's neck and gray hair closely buzzed, and was dressed, the two times I saw him, in red, white, and blue suspenders and shiny black and white wing-tips. He doesn't come off as particularly fanatical, and his initial objective for the institute does not sound radical.

He thinks evangelicals have closed themselves into what he calls a "ghetto" of their own making. They have fled mainstream culture rather than engage it. But if evangelicals expect to be depicted fairly and fully by the elite media, Case says, they need to get their hands dirty and play a role in the institutions that define the larger culture. This doesn't mean he wants journalism to be done differently. He just wants enough evangelicals to be at places like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* so that reporters begin to see them as living, breathing people and not backward bible-thumpers.

"The homosexuals are our role model in this," Case says. "They had the same problems we do twenty, twenty-five years ago — a despised minority hiding in the closet, and all the stories in the media looked to point out their weaknesses. They overcame this by integrating into the mainstream."

Case's other, longer-term objective is, by his own admission, more controversial. It is to bring "an evangelical or biblical perspective to the newsroom." Case thinks that evangelicals, seeing the world as they do through the ethical and moral lens of religion, could make much-needed adjustments to journalism's focus. The institute was not necessary fifty years ago, he says, when "Judeo-Christian values were regnant in America and something like *Roe v. Wade* would never have become an issue." But now that we live in a "postmodern, post-Christian world," Case says, news-

rooms are once again in need of a moral compass. He doesn't want to dismantle the principles of good journalism, which, he says, are "eternal." He doesn't want to evangelize. He just wants the "religious aspect of life" to be articulated in stories, and for issues like abortion or gay marriage to be framed in a way that allows for more than just a secular perspective. It boils down to this: "Most of the elite media are tone deaf to religious concerns," Case says. "They just don't see the value to any issue that has a flavor of religion. A secularist will always ignore the religious side of life and way of thinking. Evangelicals won't."

Case insists that his vision doesn't involve trampling on journalistic objectivity. And the content of his courses reinforces this. The two times I visited the seminar I saw standard J-school instruction, all nut graphs and inverted pyramids. I heard no talk of using journalism as a tool for evangelical propaganda.

But once I spoke with the students, it became clear that the divide — between the imperatives of their faith and those of their chosen profession — was much blurrier for them than Case's vision assumes. One afternoon, over a lunch of bologna slices on hamburger buns with ketchup, four students told me how journalism was a "calling" for them. As Adam Belz, a blond twenty-year-old who attends Covenant College in Georgia, put it, "God is the originator of reality, so knowledge of him is knowledge of reality. If I look to God as the source of truth, that helps me in my profession."

All acknowledged similar motivations for choosing journalism. But they also insisted that, more than anything else, it was the love of writing that had made them want to be reporters. And then I asked what they would do when, in the course of their reporting, they met someone who was impoverished or hungry or in mourning. Would they be able to keep from bringing Christ to this person? This was a tough one. They debated for a few minutes. But the conclusion was unanimous. "All the teachers tell us to not mix faith and work, not to use your position to tell everyone about Christ," said Lauren Jones, twenty, a journalism major at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "But if we care about people, have a burden in our heart for them, we cannot hold in truth which is within us."

Belz jumped in: "If salvation and heaven and hell are at stake," he said, "it's going to be necessary for me to say something."

Case would not be happy to hear his students sounding like missionaries. Earlier this year, Jack Kelley, the disgraced *USA Today* reporter, brought some

unwanted attention to the World Journalism Institute that made its mission look more fanatical than Case would like it to appear. Kelley, a Pulitzer finalist in 2002 for coverage of international terrorism, was arguably the highest-profile evangelical journalist in the country. "I feel God's pleasure when I write and report," Kelley was quoted as saying in the May 2001 issue of *Connection Magazine*, an evangelical publication. "It isn't because of the glory, but because God has called me to proclaim truth." He was slated to speak at a luncheon during the summer seminar this year. But when his editors at *USA Today* discovered that he had fabricated more than a dozen stories during the past ten years, Case told Kelley he could still speak if he used the occasion to explain his misdeeds. Kelley declined and Case removed him from the list of speakers. In the meantime, through the magic of Google, many bloggers looking for information on Kelley found their way to the institute's Web site and its mission statement, written six years ago by Case.

The sprawling, angry statement, peppered with biblical citations gave the impression, Case now says, "that we wanted to create a theocracy in the newsroom." A typical line: "There was a time when the major newspapers of this country reflected the truth of God's existence. But because we Christians did not fight for God in the newsrooms, these cultural institutions went the way of the flesh."

Case says he is "ashamed" of the mission statement's militant tone. It cost him a few of his instructors and guest speakers, whose connection to the institute, and thus the mission statement, circulated on the Internet. People like David Cho at *The Washington Post*, Rod Dreher at *The Dallas Morning News*, and Barbara Bradley Hagerty at NPR. Many wanted nothing to do with WJI anymore, Case says. Some just wanted their names removed from the public list. Case immediately replaced the mission statement with a more benign version that he now says should have been there all along.

But this raises the question: What kind of journalists does Robert Case really want to produce? Evangelical crusaders or quality reporters indistinguishable from any other? There is one man Case raises up as a shining example for his students to emulate: John McCandlish Phillips. To younger journalists, Phillips's name might not ring a bell, but for the eighteen years he worked as a reporter for *The New York Times*, from 1955 to 1973, he was considered one of its very best writers. Gay Talese, who was at the *Times* during the same period, has said of him, "There was only one guy I thought I was not the equal of, and that was McCandlish Phillips."

He also was, and still is, a devout evangelical who kept a Bible on his desk at the *Times* "as a statement of who I

was and what I believed," he says. He doesn't like the term Christian journalist. He sees himself rather as a journalist who happens to be Christian. "You are not out on a campaign for a conversion of souls; you are out on a very direct campaign to get information for an organ of public knowledge," Phillips told me.

His work at the *Times* was distinguished by a fine, almost sensual attention to detail that was the envy of other journalists. He wrote features that depicted ordinary people with the richness of Technicolor — a Brooklyn high-school principal who was also a ragtime piano player, a homeless man and his social life at the Port Authority Bus Terminal, and, famously, a Jewish boy from Queens who became an American Nazi and a Ku Klux Klansman. But in the newsroom, Phillips largely kept his distance from fellow reporters, staying clear of the gambling and heavy drinking that engaged some of his colleagues after work. He says it's an "absurdity" to think there should be any contradiction between being both an evangelical and a professional journalist. "I found them rather well coordinated," he says.

His belief played a role in his work only insofar as it provided him with God as a "helper" as he searched out facts. "Exercising faith in a living being who cares is not an exercise in futility," Phillips says. "God simply is with those who repose their trust in him. I was given advantages in reporting all the time that I could not have had apart from a living trust in the living God. I would go to a news scene. There would be fourteen other reporters. It would be a confusing scene, hard to know your way through it, who was who. Again and again and again, I would come back with more story than other reporters. Yes, I was acutely alert, but I was also given advantages."

Phillips teaches at the institute for free, as opposed to the \$250 an hour most instructors receive. He doesn't talk to students about theology. Rather, he tells them what books to read, tries to inspire them about the newspaper life, challenges them to be keen observers of the world — advice one could imagine hearing from any legendary journalist.

Phillips typifies the first half of Case's vision, a gifted reporter sustained by his relationship with God. Ultimately, though, the kind of journalist the institute strives to produce might be found somewhere between the staid model Phillips presents and the religious idealism of the students. First, endeavor to be extraordinary journalists, Case insists to his charges. Then, he tells them, you will have earned the right to bring your evangelical perspective into the newsroom, and offer an alternative to the godless and cynical atmosphere that he and most evangelicals believe predominates in the press. ■

*Gal Beckerman is a former assistant editor of CJR.*

## BEHIND THE CAMERA

A boy is killed, and a documentary  
by two young men in Brooklyn gets real

## THE SHOOTING

BY RACHEL MORRIS



DANIEL HOWARD

**T**he idea for the documentary came sometime after Terrence Fisher's brother was shot. Terrence, who is nineteen, lives in the Louis Armstrong housing project in Brooklyn and attends a television production program for teenagers called Pro-TV, at the Downtown Community Television Center in Manhattan. One day in May last year Terrence showed up for class shaking. He said his brother had been shot accidentally in a random argument, and that the bullet had traveled through his neck and lodged in his back. Later, after

Terrence heard that his brother would be okay, his instructor, Mami Kuwano, said, "This seems like a big problem in your neighborhood. Why don't you make a documentary about it?" That's how it started.

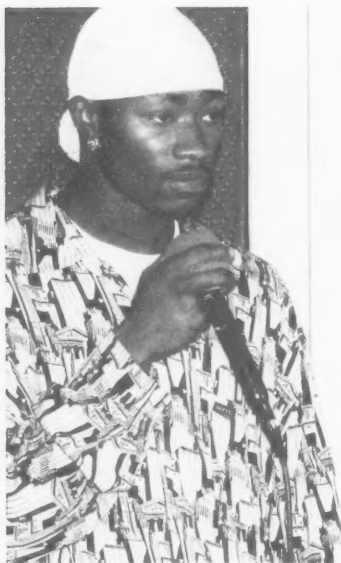
Terrence and another student, Daniel Howard, had been filming for several months when the second shooting occurred. This incident was front-page news, and most of the leads went like this one, from *Newsday* on January 25:

A police officer patrolling a Bedford-Stuyvesant housing project early yesterday morning shot and killed an unarmed 18-year-old man as he headed with friends to a party, a shooting for which Police Commissioner Ray Kelly said "there appears to be no justification."

News reports explained that Officer Richard Neri was checking the roof of the Louis Armstrong houses just after midnight when he opened the door and was apparently startled by Timothy Stansbury in the stairwell. Several articles mentioned Terrence, who had been standing behind Timothy when Neri fired from four feet away. Timothy and Terrence and another friend fled together down five flights of stairs, their descent traced by a thin trail of blood seeping from Timothy's chest. He collapsed in the entranceway. Terrence hid in a third-floor apartment while the police called an ambulance that took Timothy to Woodhull Hospital, where he died before sunrise.

Six months later, in July, Terrence, Daniel, and Kuwano were fine-tuning a short "work-in-progress" video, which included material from before and after the shooting. Terrence watched his own long, lean frame on the screen, speaking with terse eloquence about gun violence, or skillfully negotiating an interview with a wary cluster of guys on a roof. When the film shifted to a darkened apartment, in which the on-screen Terrence sat slumped over a table on the day after the shooting, Terrence got up, muttered something about it being "freezing that day," and left. For the rest of that afternoon, Daniel focused on stitching





**TERRENCE FISHER** talks about his documentary at the Pro-TV graduation

together the film's two distinct halves: a penetrating view of gun violence in Bedford-Stuyvesant, and the aftermath of Timothy's death. As he wrote titles and tweaked transitions, the neighborhood's response to the shooting unfolded and retracted on screen, over and over again.

In its rare perspective and difficult development, the film reflects the vantage point of the two students. Since Timothy's death, Terrence has drifted away from the project and returned to it repeatedly. The film, which still lacks a name, has also left a deep imprint on Daniel, a sunny but quiet young man whose steady efforts are nudging it toward completion. Kuwano hopes that it will be screened publicly in September.

The work in progress capped the Pro-TV graduation on July 8, a noisy, heart-warming evening attended by family, friends, DCTV staff, and donors. An accomplished speaker, Daniel stood out even among a graduating class whose members are almost all bound for college with scholarships. The emcee made special mention of Daniel's plans: a degree in mass communications at Claflin University in

South Carolina, and a four-year summer internship with the local NBC affiliate. Daniel gave a little skip as he was honored for his short video, *State of Mind: Living in the Projects*.

Terrence hadn't wanted to watch the work-in-progress at the graduation, but he sat to the side of the stage and looked at the screen over his shoulder, only lowering his eyes once or twice. Afterward, there were a lot of questions, and Terrence answered them with the same intense charisma that he displays on camera. A man asked him what he planned to do next, and he said he was thinking about going into the music industry, but intends to finish the film. "I want to let the world see," he said. "I want them to feel my pain and see what happened." Another man asked, "How many people do you know who have been shot in your neighborhood?" "Eight," Terrence said, without pausing. "What about you?" the man asked Daniel. "I would have to say, only three," Daniel said.

**W**hen Daniel Howard started at Pro-TV two years ago, he was small, almost skinny. He rarely talked or looked people in the eye. He hadn't wanted to join the program, but his mother knew she "had to get him into something." Linda Howard is a nurse, with the sort of warm, mellow voice that you want all nurses to have. She lives in a "pretty rough project" and always worried she'd lose Daniel to the street. As he avoided the guys who cut school or joined gangs, he became increasingly introverted. "He needed some form of self-expression," she says. "I just felt that he had so much within him that he needed to get out."

Jon Alpert, DCTV's co-director and an award-winning documentary filmmaker, says the change began when Daniel won a prize at the Hamptons International Film Festival for *State of Mind*. "It became a project for myself," Daniel says, "the idea that you could show someone living in the projects and trying to survive." His next film, *Jai Yen: Cool Heart*, chronicled the forty-two days Daniel spent in Laos with Where There Be Dragons, a nonprofit organization. The video begins in his Brooklyn housing project, permeated with concrete and brick. The shift to the lime-green rice fields and gray skies of rural Laos was as jarring for Daniel as it is for the viewer. He stayed in villages with no electricity; the nights were "pitch black and the sky was all lit up and dark purple and full of stars." He'd never encountered such quietness in Brooklyn. When it became unnerving he would open up his camera lens and play *State of Mind*.

The many festival awards Daniel won for both films nourished his confidence, but didn't make a media career seem tangible. He felt the Army offered the safest route to a college degree. His mother wasn't sure about television. "We sat down and had a conversation about it being a viable career for a young black male coming from the 'hood," she says. "My biggest fear was, is this a pipe dream for him, or can he sustain it?"

During an editing session, Kuwano teased Daniel about a wobbly camera shot. Daniel paused the video, halting some local residents who were marching in one of the protests that followed Timothy's death. "You try marching twenty blocks and trying to film people," he said. He looked at the angry, confused faces on the screen frozen against a glacial blue sky. "It was so cold," he said. "I was really tired, I felt like I wanted to vomit. Terrence felt it, too. I wasn't even walking at the pace of the people marching, I was jogging, to stay ahead." Still, shooting and

editing the film fused Daniel's interest in documentaries with ambition. "Terrence's film really put me on track," he says. "I feel like I'm working on a documentary that can change people's stereotypes."

The newspaper coverage of Timothy Stansbury's death was striking for the way that all the stories seized on identical details, as if straining for the same familiar narrative. *Newsday* and the *New York Daily News* both headlined double-page spreads with Timothy's grandmother's claim that he was the "best boy on the block," and every reporter found someone who said Timothy was going to make something of his life. Sometimes this tale of interrupted promise swung on pitifully threadbare evidence. Most stories played up his job at a local McDonald's — one noted that he "liked being on the register." This is not to say that the reporters did a bad job, simply that the constraints of daily journalism encourage certain formulas. "Under deadline and under pressure, you come up with this short story," said David Krajicek, a former crime bureau chief for the *Daily News* and author of *Scooped! Media Miss Real Story on Crime While Chasing Sex, Sleaze and Celebrities*. "It's a caricature, but for a daily newspaper, that's about all you can get."

Terrence and Daniel's documentary seems likely to vault these conventions. "In terms of content and reporting, this is going to stomp anybody," Alpert of DCTV says. This is partly a result of access, partly of style. The Pro-TV students and the professional TV crews filmed similar moments, but the students thrust the viewer into the story while the mannered news stories hold us at a distance. The work-in-progress video entered kitchens and living rooms, the camera jammed up against doorways or searching shocked faces, not just for sound bites but for protracted scenes of grief and confusion. In contrast, as the Timothy Stansbury story faded, news programs whitened their footage into oddly unpopulated montages, shedding Timothy's family and favoring desolate shots of the housing project where he lived. NY1 eventually pared the story down to a still shot of the rooftop, barren except for little heaps of dirty snow; and a slow pan toward the red metal door and the gaping, shadowed stairwell.

Daniel's achievements have a narrative pull that most journalists would find hard to resist: the reassuring tale of the bright kid who makes it out of the ghetto, quelling our unease about the others who don't. The last time I interviewed him was a rainy Friday afternoon, and he would start his NBC internship the next Monday. He'd been editing footage that he, Terrence, and another student had shot the previous day. "Before this, I didn't feel like I had any power to change my environment," he told me. "Before, I didn't feel like I had a voice. Now I know I have a voice." He had an old military hat perched jauntily on his head, and he seemed to be in one of those exuberant moods when it feels like the facts of your life are arranging themselves into a story you can be proud of.

Terrence's future is less certain. He was reluctant to discuss the film. But he seems determined to make some sense of the problems eroding his community. "Terrence has stuck with this, despite numerous opportunities to quit," Alpert says. Finishing the film will determine "whether he wants to be a victim or a victor." ■

Rachel Morris is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in New York.

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NAASHON ZALK/AP WIDEWORLD

**THE VOTERS:** Residents of Alexandra, north of Johannesburg, line up to vote in April in their nation's third democratic election

## LETTER FROM JOHANNESBURG

South African democracy is just ten years old,  
and the shift from apartheid has been wrenching,  
both in the streets and in the newsrooms

# THE TROUBLE WITH TRANSFORMATION

BY DOUGLAS FOSTER

It's shortly after 9 a.m. on a cool April morning in Cape Town, the cusp of winter here, just one day before South Africa's third national democratic election. I'm here for a few days before heading on to Johannesburg. From the steps of the L-shaped building that serves as headquarters for Cape Town's two English-language daily newspapers, you can look south over your shoulder toward the craggy slopes of Table Mountain.

Ride the ancient elevator up to the cavernous newsroom that serves both the morning *Cape Times* and the afternoon *Cape Argus*. Through lead-framed windows, snatches of matte gray sky and the blue-green waters of Duncan Dock are visible. Farther out to sea lies Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned from 1964 to 1990.

It used to be illegal for newspapers like these to print Mandela's name or publish his photograph. Older reporters and editors in the room remember when "Whites Only" signs were posted at the entrance to the toilets. It's a brand new country, they'll tell you. These days it is opponents of the African National Congress, Mandela's party, who complain — not about the threat of arrest, but rather about being treated as nonentities by the media (especially the government-controlled South African Broadcasting Corporation).

Reporters for the afternoon paper, dressed casually, jam into a conference room around a massive oval oak table. They're a thoroughly multiracial bunch, a sign of how much has changed since Mandela was elected president ten years ago.

A closer look tells a more nuanced story, however. At the news editor's end of the table mostly white

staff members cluster. In the middle section are the mixed-race reporters ("coloured" in apartheid-era parlance, still widely used). At the far end of the table near the door, as if to signal their more recent arrival, are the black reporters.

The news editor, Vivien Horler, gets right to the big story. South Africa's first democratic election brought in Mandela as president in 1994, followed by transition to his successor, Thabo Mbeki, in 1999. Will tomorrow's vote lead to a third straight rout of opposition parties by the African National Congress? The strongest challengers — Tony Leon's Democratic Alliance and Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party — have been hammering on the government for failing to deliver a better life for the country's black majority. Unemployment is high, and the gap between rich and poor is growing. President Mbeki has been storming the country in shirtsleeves, promising to do better. The alleviation of poverty is at the center of the ANC's campaign.

A few reporters have been assigned to track down politicians at their voting stations for comment, but they protest that this is such a tired convention. Murray Williams, a white reporter, suggests finding especially interesting people who are not politicians to interview. A number of his colleagues chime in, mentioning neighborhoods in the city where well-known writers, architects, and theater people live.

A huff of disbelief blows down from the far end of the table. Zenzile Khoisan, a stick-thin investigative reporter in a black baseball cap, says: "That's all very nice for us to spend time in the wealthy districts, eh? Aren't they having an election in Khayelitsha, too?" He ticks off



the names of other townships where blacks and mixed-race people had been forced to live under apartheid.

Williams stiffens in his chair. He's having none of his colleague's guff. "That's a very good question, Zenzile," he says with an air of condescension. "So maybe you can tell us what important nonpolitician lives out there in Khayelitsha."

An edgy silence descends. Reporters sitting at the predominantly white end of the table turn toward Horler, the news editor. At the other end, black journalists offer one another pinched glances. (Here's one more implication: The posh neighborhoods tend toward the opposition while the townships are heavily pro-ANC.) Nobody intervenes, or suggests the names of athletes, musicians, activists, or small business-

## The biggest problem is the dearth of opportunities for bright, ambitious, but undereducated blacks

women living in the townships who actually might be worth interviewing. An opportunity is missed.

The flare-up is short-lived. Some in the room are bound to think I've made too much of it. Most of the older editors in the room, and across the way at the *Cape Times*, boast anti-apartheid credentials, after all. And many of the younger white reporters, like Williams, are liberals who have spent most of their working lives in a supposedly new, nonracial South Africa. Williams argues that reporters in this newsroom have successfully moved beyond historical racial divisions. He and Zenzile just enjoy stirring things up, he says. "Things are generally cool."

Take others aside to chat one by one, though, and you'll find that tension is rife along racial lines. Non-white journalists point out that the complexion of the newsroom is still far paler than the population at large. Wouldn't real transformation — the opening of professions long dominated by white men to non-whites and women — mean that only 10 percent of the reporters and editors should be white? Joseph Aranes, the gruff political editor of the *Cape Argus*, says pointedly: "Lots of white people in the newsroom don't know what the hell is going on in Cape Town!" Dozens more whites will have to move on, he adds, so that the papers can be "transformed to reflect our new reality."

Add another wrinkle: Mixed-race journalists report

being lost between their white and black colleagues. They're 11.5 percent of the population in the country but make up 54 percent of the population in the Western Cape. Anti-apartheid activists made it a point to promote solidarity and subvert the government's categories by calling all nonwhites black, but shades of difference still matter. Older "coloured" reporters tell me, for example, that under apartheid they weren't considered "white enough" for equal treatment, but now they don't feel "black enough."

Some whites, on the other hand, complain privately of being sidelined, denied promotions on the basis of skin color, and inhibited from raising questions about falling editorial standards by the fear of being labeled racist. They worry about the inclination of most newspapers to hew so closely to the ANC line and wonder if black journalists have the appetite to be tough watchdogs over this government.

Newsrooms here are microcosms of the larger political atmosphere. President Mbeki has berated the newspapers for behaving like the opposition, and his ministers put particularly intense pressure on non-white editors. Opposition leaders, in turn, accuse reporters and editors of pro-government bias. Those criticisms carry a racial charge. Tony Leon, the white leader of the Democratic Alliance, the largest opposition party, argues that the transformation of newsrooms "has been used to basically cleanse the newsroom of the old order and bring in the new. That's why it's driven with such fervor in the government. The assumption is that if you're black and you're young you're likely to be an ANC supporter."

Bring up any number of charged subjects these reporters are likely to cover in any given week — poverty, AIDS, economic development, corruption, crime, and even sports — and you get an inkling of the challenge they face. Race still runs through everything. No issue seems more salient for the multiracial group sitting around the table in Cape Town, or more complicated, or potentially more volatile. Perhaps that's why race is so seldom discussed directly across racial lines.

The legacy of legal separation is partially to blame. Much of daily life for South Africans remains a deeply segregated experience. In spite of the emergence of a politically connected black elite, middle- and upper-income whites still may choose to live in a bubble, where nearly all the blacks they come across bag groceries, or serve food, or guard cars. That's the constraining backdrop for even the best-intentioned journalist.

While some elements of this situation may seem familiar, it's nothing like affirmative action in the U.S. Publishers here face stringent government fines if they fail to achieve "employment equity." Commercial pres-



tures are probably even more influential. To grow, the country's largest newspapers, which traditionally served a white minority, must reflect the aspirations of a 79 percent black majority.

Before dawn on election day, reporters, including Zenzile Khoisan and Murray Williams, fan out across the Western Cape. In the city, they find respectable turnout. In the townships, where I'm shadowing reporters, lines of voters snake along dirt paths and meander up the street. The scene may not be quite as impressive as those iconic images of first-time voters that flashed around the world in 1994, but it's a robust demonstration of interest in the franchise all the same.

At the end of the day, the electorate, for the first time, delivers control of all nine provinces to the African National Congress. The party racks up nearly 70 percent of the nationwide balloting, its highest percentage of votes ever (though not the greatest number). The vote has, once again, fractured along racial lines: few whites voted for the ANC, and few blacks bolted to the DA — a sign, some commentators worry, of a trend toward "re-racialization."

The morning after the election, the *Cape Times* devotes nearly all its space above the fold to a beautiful photograph of a long line of voters, in silhouette at sunset, in the midst of one of the townships. The headline reads: A NATION FINDS ITS FEET. This frankly celebratory treatment serves to underscore the fact that, although the paper has been around for generations, it now serves a changing readership in a multiracial democracy just ten years old.

**I**n May I head northeast, some 900 miles, to Johannesburg, once the heart of gold mining country. Johannesburg is the buzzing ying to Cape Town's mellower yang. A crackdown on criminal syndicates in the past few years has made it safer than it was, though anyone you meet will rattle off a few hair-raising tales of carjackings and robberies.

The city and its outskirts make up a 220-square-mile colossus, much of it surprisingly wooded. It's the center of political and economic power in South Africa, and its racial makeup is a close proxy for the rest of the country. In Cape Town, where blacks were once forbidden to settle, less than a third of the population inside the city limits is black. Johannesburg is 73 percent black.

This city is a news junkie's dream. There are seven major dailies (one in Afrikaans) and nine weeklies, as well as zoned community papers with a combined circulation of over a million.

The city is the staging ground, in fact, for a fierce competition for new readers. Two years ago Naspers, a traditionally Afrikaans-language media conglomerate,

launched a daily newspaper aimed at working-class blacks. In an environment where the circulation of most other papers held steady or declined, the *Daily Sun* proved an instant sensation with its menu of noir crime reporting, sex scandals, and witchcraft tales, leavened by plenty of how-to and self-help articles. The paper rocketed to more than 300,000 circulation by late June, making it the country's largest daily.

On an unseasonably hot morning in mid-May I've arrived with a few of my students in a community where circulation of the *Daily Sun* is booming. Soweto, the black township just a twenty-minute drive southwest of Johannesburg proper, is known around the world for a mass uprising that took place in 1976. Today the town is all fired up again, this time for a far more prosaic reason.

At Mofolo Cultural Bowl, with its large stage and lush lawn, we're about to learn, from a live broadcast projected on a huge screen, whether Morocco or South Africa will host the 2010 Soccer World Cup. It is impossible to overstate the significance of this decision. It seems as though every Walkman in the township is tuned to minute-by-minute reports about the progress of the lobbying effort by President Mbeki, Mandela, and Desmond Tutu. (Radio still has the greatest geographic reach in South Africa, far ahead of television and totally swamping print.) Crowds of children in shorts and faded shirts sit quietly on the grass as if waiting for the results of a big exam.

A hunky hip-hop star named Wendy pleads with two great powers — the Lord and Mandela — to exert their influence on the world soccer federation. "South Africa is calling on the Madiba magic," he sings, using Mandela's nickname, which means "grandfather."

The massive screen behind Wendy flickers with the image of a luxury sedan pulling up outside the soccer federation headquarters in Zurich. The crowd stirs. Mandela has arrived. His hair is a brilliant white and he's dressed in an ornate yellow silk shirt.

Children in the park leap to their feet, clapping as if he might hear them. Our emcee asks everyone to remain standing. He instructs us to hold hands. The announcer from SABC suggests that it's not too late to send instant messages of prayer from our cell phones. We join in one looping chain across the grass, my pale hands firmly grasped on each side by grown black men, both of whom are unashamedly trembling.

Finally, the federation president is handed an envelope: It's South Africa. I have been at scores of sports events and political rallies in my life, but have never experienced anything like this social explosion. People of all ages levitate, issuing hosannas. A cacophonous roar rolls on and on. Then the hugging begins, not pro forma handclaps but close, sustained embraces.

When the noise subsides, I fall into conversation

with the young man on my left. As it turns out, he's a budding journalist. Bongani Mdagane, twenty-four, was raised in a rural province, and he quickly reveals himself to be the sort of bright, eager, and informed young person who ought to be drawn into the profession. He tells me that he's dying to become a full-fledged reporter. "I've got the will and the spirit to do it. It's the only thing I want to do," he says. He taps his chest. "It's the thing that moves me — in here."

There are plenty of obstacles. A few years ago, Mdagane put himself through part of his first year of college-level journalism training at an expensive private academy. (These academies are notoriously inadequate at preparing students for a journalism career.) But he lost his job, couldn't pay the fees, and had to drop out.

Mdagane describes his conundrum without a stitch of self-pity. Looking around at the boisterous crowd, he adds: "I'm living in Soweto and I'd like to report the truth about what's happening here. But if I can't finish my studies because I can't get a job, how do I get started?"

He's placed his finger on the nub of the biggest problem — the dearth of opportunities for bright and ambitious but undereducated blacks. How can editors here ever turn newsrooms into proxies for the population if neither the universities nor the newspaper companies have invested in the talents and aspirations of young people like him?

In downtown Johannesburg, a few blocks from the majestic Supreme Court building and not far from the world-famous Market Theater, two block-long buildings face off across Sauer Street — the national headquarters of the African National Congress and of the Independent Group, the country's largest chain of dailies (of which the Cape Town papers are a part).

*The Star*, 117 years old, is the flagship of the Independent Group. The paper, which for much of its history represented the perspective of English-speaking whites, also played a significant role in the struggle against apartheid. The newspaper served, too, as a kind of training ground for many of the best journalists in the country, including influential black editors like Mathatha Tsedu at *City Press*, Mondli Makhanya of the *Sunday Times* (the largest Sunday paper), and Justice Malala at *This Day*.

The paper lost a chunk of its circulation, along with its luster, after its halcyon days in the early 1990s. The building now is a dreary, stained, run-down box. When Sir Anthony O'Reilly, an Irishman who runs Independent News & Media Ltd., bought *The Star* in 1995, many thought it would herald a new era of prosperity. The dilapidated facilities and overstretched editorial staff prove how illusory this prediction was.

"There's a doctoral dissertation still to be written about how this one man, Tony O'Reilly, destroyed South African journalism," says Ryland Fisher, who edited the *Cape Times* for several years and now runs a key journalism training program at Peninsula Technikon.

On a morning in early June, I catch up with Moegsien Williams, *The Star's* current top editor. He doesn't agree with Fisher, his friend and former colleague. At the moment he's running an editorial meeting. It's been a hell of a month for news: the seating of Parliament after the election; the president's appointment of ministers; the deepening split within the ANC over a crooked arms deal in which the deputy president, Jacob Zuma, has been implicated; the on-again, off-again rollout of AIDS medication in public health clinics; a series of horrific multiple murders; a raft of vicious sexual assaults; the death of the pop icon Brenda Fassie after a drug overdose; a vigorous debate within the ANC over affirmative action, with both the defense minister and the minister of sport raising doubts about the government's policy; and the announcement of the World Cup selection.

It's a bit disorienting to find Williams running a mainstream newspaper. He was once a union activist and cofounder of radical publications inspired by Steven Biko. His closest friends, including his current boss, Nazeem Howa, executive director of operations for the group, worked with him at *South*, a movement publication whose primary goal was to publicize the activities of banned organizations and to overthrow the apartheid state. After 1994 Williams rocketed to the top, serving in swift succession as the first non-white editor at *Pretoria News*, then *Cape Argus*, then *Cape Times*, and now *The Star*.

At the meeting, he finds himself enmeshed in a discussion of complaints about the paper's political coverage. "Tony Leon doesn't like us," one of the editors volunteers, speaking of the leader of the opposition. "He sees us as the lapdog of the ANC." Williams, fifty-two, is a poker-faced man with a deceptively laid-back style. But the allegation of bias clearly stings. "That criticism is just ridiculous," he says. He jabs his thumb in the direction of Sauer Street. "They think it's convenient that ANC headquarters is right there, as if we go over all the time taking orders."

Actually there have been steady complaints about bias from the other direction as well — from Mandela to the current ANC leadership — accusing editors of behaving too much like the opposition. The critics, both from the government and the opposition, don't understand the delicate balance that a "new cadre of reporters and editors" must now pull off, Williams says.

When you consider how poorly trained many in this new cadre are, you get a sense of the magnitude

of the challenge editors like Williams face. In a country of eleven official languages, many of his reporters (including the whites raised speaking Afrikaans) struggle to write well in English. For some of his reporters, English is a third language.

University programs and craft schools simply aren't turning out graduates ready to enter the newsroom, Williams says. This isn't just the predictable complaint of someone from a pioneering generation. An industrywide survey several years ago by the South African National Editors' Forum revealed that many reporters who had been on the job from two to five years had a limited mastery of basic journalistic skills. A majority could not answer the following question correctly: "If 4,000,000 Zimbabwean citizens indicated that they were going to vote, and 2,000,000 indicated that they were not going to vote, what percentage of Zimbabwean citizens will vote?"

The survey spawned a terrible new word: juniorization. It covers a multitude of sins. When more experienced reporters left the profession because they were traumatized by covering the political violence that swept the country in the 1980s, or crime or AIDS in the 1990s; when talented reporters get snatched up at double their salaries by government or corporations as spinmeisters; when someone gets promoted beyond his abilities, and even when a reporter gets a story wrong, "juniorization" is the one-size-fits-all label used to shame newsroom denizens without mentioning explicitly that most of the "juniors" are black.

The reporters in *The Star* newsroom are a congenial, multiracial bunch. They treat their boss like a venerated eccentric uncle. Take a few of them aside for lunch or a beer, though, and you'll get a glimpse of how anguished they feel about conditions in the newsroom. They, like many of their editors, wish Williams would stand up to the bean counters in the company and fight for more resources. On some days, they point out, there are just a dozen reporters on call to cover a metropolis of more than 3.2 million people, and that's not counting Soweto and the other townships.

In the past decade, *The Star's* editorial staff has been slashed roughly in half, to about 120. The paper's lauded in-house Cadet School was shut down just as several executives were arguing that both entry-level and advanced training was needed to ease the historic transition about to occur in its newsroom.

Thin staffing means less of an opportunity for editors to mentor young talent, the reporters point out. It translates into a harsher environment for newcomers trying to find their footing. It also means less of a chance for reporters to specialize and deepen their expertise. It means fewer enterprise stories. It means

more "what" and "when" stories, less analysis and explication of the "why."

Back in his office, Williams acknowledges that the Independent Group was far too slow in recruiting, training, promoting, and retaining nonwhite talent. "Many other institutions in South Africa saw the writing on the wall in the 1980s," he says. "We woke up in 1994."

But Williams objects to the suggestion that editorial values have been erased by business-side objectives. The way he sees it, he helped his boss face down formidable threats to the paper's survival. Circulation had fallen from a high of about 230,000 in 1994 to a low of 152,000 four years ago, he says. Under his direction, earnings trebled and *The Star's* circulation ticked back up to 172,000.

"The reality is that I've helped grow *The Star* and make the paper play the role that it has to play in the society," he says. "You won't have the opportunity if you let the business fall apart."

The paper "is in the marrow of Johannesburg," Williams argues, a city that, like South Africa, has been in a state of flux for the past decade. Perhaps it reflects its place and time. Even though the paper has a majority of black readers now, *The Star* is still widely seen as "white controlled." Williams wants to reinvent the paper for its multiracial future — something his chief competitors, who aim at either white or black, don't have to do.

He takes a deep breath. The success or failure of his effort to produce a paper through which the city of Johannesburg "talks to itself" will turn, to a large degree, on transforming the newsroom into a reflection of the world outside this building. "If we don't succeed in transforming this country and affirming the majority — and if the majority of the people don't have a stake in its survival — everything will be lost," he says softly. He points over his shoulder at the newsroom. "The young black reporters out there," he adds, "are the future custodians of a free press in this country."

At the edge of Auckland Park — one of Johannesburg's most vibrant neighborhoods, where lofts, handicraft shops, cafés, and clubs signify the next hip thing — you'll find the brick-and-glass headquarters of the *Mail & Guardian*, circulation 39,000. This newspaper is South Africa's intellectual leader, with a venerable history of anti-apartheid exposés and a strong reputation, post-1994, for breaking stories about corruption within the new government.

On a cold, gray morning in late June, Ferial Haffajee, hired as the editor in January, greets me in her office with a frank challenge: "The state of our media is healthier than the state of your media," she says, launching into a critique of flag-waving Ameri-

can press coverage of the war in Iraq. It's been a bad few months for the U.S. reputation among South Africans, and the worst of it, such as photos of prisoners tortured at Abu Ghraib prison, has gotten splashy page-one play.

Haffajee, a thirty-seven-year-old classified as Indian-Malay under the old apartheid distinctions, grew up in Bosmont, a mixed-race township outside Johannesburg. "I grew up thinking of myself as black because my brothers taught me about black consciousness," she says.

She started working at the paper as a business writer in the late 1990s, went off to the *Financial Mail*, and returned to the staff two years ago. She was named its first female black editor when Mondli Makhanya, a black man, moved on to edit the *Sunday Times*. (Makhanya heralds his successor's appointment as a historic moment in South African media. "After ten years of democracy, and fifteen years after Mandela was released," he told me, "it's astonishing that we have only one female editor of a mainstream newspaper in the whole country.")

Haffajee cocks her head toward the doorway, listening to the buzz of a newsroom coming to life. Her chief reporters and editors file into her office for their 10 a.m. editorial meeting. Ten years ago the *Mail & Guardian* had a mostly white staff. The reporters in the room today are a mix of black and white, men and women.

There's a looser, more congenial atmosphere in this newsroom than in others I've visited. Wisani Waka Ngobeni, an investigative reporter at the paper, addresses a colleague's story about a small-town mayor accused of steering contracts to his numerous wives. The mayor is an ANC stalwart. Throw in the fact that one of the mayor's wives is white, and you might expect some awkwardness.

"One of the wives divorced him," Ngobeni reports.

"They all divorced him?" a reporter asks.

"No, just the white one." Everyone laughs — perhaps not for precisely the same reason, but more or less at the same time.

Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya reads his planned lead for a takeout on the country's proposed hate-speech law, which would criminalize public advocacy of hatred based on race, ethnicity, gender, or religion: "If patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels, then freedom of expression must be the bigot's favorite hideout." There's a hush in the room, and the audible sound of grinding teeth from an editor sitting near me.

Haffajee leans back in her chair. There's a colloquy, partly along racial lines, about the importance of protecting people from verbal assault on the one hand, and protecting freedom of speech on the other. It's a bracing exchange. "We have to go for absolute freedom of expression," Haffajee says, ending the debate.

The meeting moves on, but Moya's article morphs over the next few days into the lead essay for the "Comment and Analysis" section. The cover story is on the nepotistic mayor with the complicated home life.

A few days later, I have lunch at a café called the Color Bar, with Ngobeni. He's just twenty-seven and he came to the paper through its renowned training program. Ngobeni tells me that although there's been tremendous progress under Haffajee's leadership, the paper is not yet the Promised Land. A few weeks ago, for example, a picture of an unidentified black man was splashed on the cover under the headline: IS THIS THE FACE OF CORRUPTION? Since there was no caption identifying the man as a corrupt official accused of a particular crime, a black face was used in a generic way to symbolize a problem. "That was bad! That was bad, bad, bad!" Ngobeni says, getting worked up all over again.

He acknowledges that his reaction to the photo connects to a deeper discomfort. Many of his contemporaries consider ANC figures now in government to be heroic. He finds himself worrying about the effects of a steady diet of stories about corruption in the public sector — as opposed, say, to a focus on white-collar fraud in business. The careless pursuit of such stories could even undercut confidence in black majority rule. "I don't think many white journalists see this dimension," he says.

After work, I head back to the Color Bar for a beer with Ngobeni's white colleague, Stefaans Brummer. (Brummer eschews apartheid-era race classifications, preferring to call himself "African.") He joined the staff right before the 1994 election, when it was "a lot whiter," he says, after getting his start in journalism as a reporter at the *Cape Argus*. He saw the struggle against apartheid up close; his biggest story from those days was an exposé about a massacre of ANC supporters in one of the homelands.

Integration of the newsroom was overdue on the merits, in Brummer's view. But he says transformation was necessary for journalistic reasons, too. For a time after the 1994 election there was a fair amount of "sunshine journalism," in which the transition to ANC rule was mostly lauded, uncritically. In the mid-1990s, when the paper began breaking stories of government corruption, "We were increasingly attacked by officials accusing us and others of racism," Brummer says.

So he looks at the changing demography of his own newsroom from a slightly different angle: "The newsroom was under pressure to transform. But transformation did not mean a change in mindset about our journalistic responsibilities," he says. "Sure, the newsroom has become more representative. And that has given us more of an opportunity to be tough."

In many ways, Brummer and Ngobeni exemplify



how transformation is supposed to work. They've recently been at loggerheads a few times about "a certain investigation," Brummer acknowledges. One of the chief antagonists in this investigation is white, the other black. Brummer has a more solid line into the whites while Ngobeni is tighter with the blacks. They've gone back and forth on how to interpret the information they've gleaned. But they haven't spoken much, at least not yet, about how race might be influencing their own relationship or their treatment of the story. Why not? Brummer turns up his palms. "Race is often the final barrier."

Back at the office, Haffajee is proofing final pages. Highlighted streaks at her crown set off jet-black hair pulled tightly back. She checks the stories that have been taped to the windows of her office — one about a nanny fired by her employer when she tested HIV-positive, the other about threats from the government of Zimbabwe to stop the *Mail & Guardian* from circulating there.

There are other, more serious threats. A collection of lawsuits filed by ANC officials has cost both time and money. Competitive commercial pressures are intense. "Democracy came to South Africa just as globalization hit," she points out. Pressure to do more with less collides with the obligation to train the next generation of crusading

journalists. "The changes we need to make will never come as a result of what politicians tell us to do. In the end, it will come only from us," she says.

At the end of our conversation, Haffajee says something that startles me, perhaps more than anything else I've heard in newsrooms around South Africa. She tosses off casually that she expects to clear out of the editor's office within a few years. She plans voluntarily to give up the influence she acquired only six months ago as the first young woman to edit the *Mail & Guardian*.

"Why in the world would you do that?" I ask. She considers me coolly, an eyebrow lifted as if I should have that figured out by now. There's a "stage we need to go through" before reaching the nonracial goal of the South African liberation struggle, she says. She ticks off, one by one, the names of even younger reporters on staff. "Because within a few years any one of them will be ready to take my place," Haffajee says softly. She pauses. "And because I'm not black." ■

*Douglas Foster is an associate professor at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. He supervises internships of journalism students at newspapers and broadcast networks in South Africa, including several of those mentioned in this article.*

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# IDEAS & REVIEWS



GLAUCO DELLA SCIUCCA

## ESSAY

### Whose Turf Is the Past?

BY ANDIE TUCHER

**J**ournalists have been making history. In big, fat volumes.

It's getting harder and harder these days to tell the difference between books of history and books of journalism. Dozens of current or former journalists — like David Halberstam, Anne Applebaum, David Maraniss, Melissa Fay Greene, Richard Kluger, Stanley Karnow, and Robert Caro — have been writing meaty books about events they may not have witnessed, set in times that are well past, and often involving people no longer available for interview. Neither first nor rough nor drafts, these books have the heft of history.

Historians, meanwhile, no longer waiting until the passions have cooled, are incorporating interviews and on-the-spot research into their writing about current or recent events, and more of them are aiming for audiences beyond academia. Oral historians may be best known for collecting the reminiscences of elderly Holocaust survivors and retired cabinet secretaries, but interviewers from Columbia's Oral History Research Office were out on the streets just days after the reporters were to ask people about their experiences on September 11, 2001.

The boundaries between historians and journalists are crashing. Does

it really matter that much? In some ways, perhaps not. "Both are basically telling a story," said Barbie Zelizer, a former reporter who now teaches at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. "And anybody who can should be tackling events that are unsolved or traumatic; it's not reserved territory. It's only the historians and journalists who are traumatized if there's no demarcation."

That demarcation, like so many others, began its long goodbye during the intellectual and social tumult of the 1960s and 1970s. Rejecting as elitist and deficient the traditional em-

phasis on politics, diplomacy, and the acts of great men, historians focused instead on ordinary and even marginalized people — women, children, peasants, slaves — who have rarely left much of a paper trail in the libraries and archives. Their lives required different research methods to reach and different techniques to narrate.

Weird things began happening to academic conventions of style, method, objectivity, even the historian's relationship to fact. In a striking reversal, Natalie Zemon Davis's book followed the movie version. After serving as a consultant on the popular 1982 film *The Return of Martin Guerre*, a mysterious true-life tale about an abandoned wife and a dramatic imposture in sixteenth-century France, the Princeton professor went back to the archives to reexamine the events with a more analytical eye. She wrote a book with the same title, ruefully acknowledging that sometimes even the most scrupulous historian can't be any more certain about events and motives than a movie. In his 1991 book *Dead Certainities: (Unwarranted Speculations)*, Simon Schama, then at Harvard, tackled the problem of historical uncertainty with more glee than rue, tickling some colleagues and appalling others with his freewheeling reimaginings — complete with interior monologues and multiple points of view — of a heroic battlefield death in the eighteenth century and a sordid campus murder in the nineteenth.

In the news business, insurgent New Journalists, dismissing traditional reporting as boring, stagnant, and inadequate, were shattering just about every convention there was: the "5 Ws" style, the 750-word article, objectivity, permissible subjects, the use of the exclamation mark, and the old-fashioned dictum that reporters should never be part of the story. The result was long articles about baton twirling and whole

books about oranges, and reporters who had been covering the era's biggest stories, especially the civil rights movement and Vietnam, took those long stories to more permanent homes between hard covers.

A generation's worth of changes in the way historians and journalists do their jobs has brought them so close together that the differences between their books sometimes seem notional, even anecdotal, to be summed up in a few generalizations — some of them, clearly, gross. Historians tend to have more endnotes, journalists more acknowledgments. Historians are the hedgehogs who know one big thing, journalists the foxes who know many things. Historians locate themselves within and draw upon (or argue with) a community of scholarship; journalists parachute in and take everyone out to lunch. Historians are freer from the pressures of the marketplace; journalists are freer to make the bestseller list. The darkest temptation of the historian is plagiarism; of the journalist, fabrication. The historians are the ones most skittish about using the first-person singular. The journalists are the ones most sunburned on the nose.

But both journalists and historians do see one consequential difference — and both see it as a strength. Nicholas Lemann, the dean of Columbia's journalism school, is working on a book that won't include a single interview with any witness or participant in the events he describes. It's about a battle over voting rights in the Reconstruction South that foreordained the election crisis of 1876, and everybody involved is dead. But besides historical significance, it has what most journalists are trained to look for and, says Lemann, what professional historians are less adept at handling: a "hell of a story."

"Historians try to pose a really interesting problem or contribute to the debate in a field," says Lemann. "But it's striking how little professional historians know about how to tell a popular story. They think 'popular' means 'picking a good topic.' They don't see that storytelling is a learned skill; they don't see that's what the nonprofessionals are doing."

That's also why, Lemann continues, it's the journalists — the Robert Caros and David McCulloughs — not the academic historians these days who are doing most of the "big-canvas books about big guys doing big things," those sweeping accounts of war or the lives of presidents. Those are *news* stories.

Diane McWhorter, who spent nearly twenty years researching and writing her Pulitzer prize-winning *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*, did get to interview people, including her own father, whose lives intersected with the lethal 1963 church bombing that lies at the heart of her book. But as a journalist venturing into history, she was, she says, "doubly obsessive; I had to be thorough, to dot all the i's."

And that wasn't all. "I came to a point where I thought I understood it all," she says, "but as a journalist bent on telling a story I also felt like I had twice the work. I had to understand the issues, but I also had to figure out how it all fit into some character's story. I was used to having to figure out what the conflict was."

Yet historians say they're not immune to the appeal of a good yarn; they just use it differently. The Princeton professor Robert Darnton has noted a surge of academic interest in what he calls "incident analysis," in which the historian starts with the sort of dramatic event any journalist would grab in a minute — a crime, a disaster, a dramatic imposture, or, as Darnton himself once did,

## ESSAY

## IDEAS &amp; REVIEWS

the "great cat massacre" by roistering apprentices in eighteenth-century Paris — and "uses the narrative material to argue a case, one where an interpretive problem is at stake," he said in an e-mail. The emphasis is on developing the thesis and sustaining the argument with adequate documentation. Indeed "narrative skill takes second place, if it figures at all."

But the journalist's professional conditioning to look for the good story, says Darnton, raises its own questions. Journalistic storytelling has a "stylized quality, which can be a disadvantage as well as an advantage. By that I mean a tendency to look for a lead instead of an argument, to hype things, overuse colorful quotes, and exaggerate the importance of personal quirks."

People have always used stories — carefully told or not — to make sense of the world, to explain its big mysteries ("Why are there bad guys?") and its small ones ("Why did he kill her?"). And it's first and foremost through journalism, especially the busy organization of daily mass journalism, that a society builds the stories it needs most urgently. Journalists and the public together construct stories to order the chaotic buzz of breaking events into a satisfying narrative that reconfirms what's both important and familiar in the world.

Because of its urgency, daily journalism is more prone to oversimplifying those narratives. Mary Marshall Clark, who as director of Columbia's Oral History Office organized the 9/11 interview project, saw that temptation in full bloom in much of the journalistic coverage of that day. While the goal of oral-history interviewers is to gather and interpret people's testimony about their experiences — "to witness the process of witnessing," says Clark — and allow the account to unfold in its own way, many journalists were

doing exactly the opposite, fitting the tragic events of the day into "a highly nationalistic frame that emphasized the heroism of the dead."

The oral historians, on the other hand, says Clark, "picked up aspects of the whole experience — the immigrants afraid their 'alien' looks might bring violence down on them, or the firefighters who were uncomfortable being portrayed as heroes because they knew they'd made mistakes." People like them were much less likely to make it into the mainstream media coverage at the time because they didn't advance the narrative that both the public and the press seemed to prefer.

But there's another problem, less deep perhaps but no less frustrating, with many of the events we call stories that make up the daily budget of the news media. Often they're not really stories at all, simply piquant episodes, dramatic or telling or cautionary slices of life served up in dizzying succession, and when their "newsworthiness" fades they're gone from the front page and the public eye. Gary Condit may once have been our constant companion at the breakfast table, but nowadays he never calls and he never writes. Or what seems to be a story proceeding steadily to its appointed end may suddenly veer into a completely new and unexpected direction — remember that "Mission Accomplished" banner? And without a visible ending it's not "a hell of a story" yet, or even a story — it's a Power Point presentation.

Which suggests that the distinction most worth exploring between history and daily journalism is neither professional nor temporal but teleological. History can have endings, and most journalism does not. Even though we know in our hearts that history is never really finished, that each new generation reinterprets the past in ways that make sense for its own particular present,

narratives of the past can offer what daily journalism almost always cannot: the illusion, at least, of completion. Even though there's no odometer that clicks over from "now" to "then," the lengthening distance between event and interpreter can bring a certain clarity of vision, as can new evidence, a shifted perspective, or someday, perhaps, even a cooler look at that dusty old archive of oral histories about 9/11. Even though the arc of any historical narrative is arbitrary — stopping with V-J Day makes a vastly different story than stopping with the Berlin airlift — writers of history have a luxury denied the daily journalist: the hindsight to choose an endpoint rather than just waiting for it to come along.

And that promise of tidy resolution may be why, as important as journalism is to the continuing conversation of society, we all ask so much of History, with a capital H. You have only to run a Lexis/Nexis search for "history" within five words of "judge" to see how widespread and irresistible is the idea that there exists some final reckoning, some great arbiter that will coolly render the verdict of the ages, Olympian and infallible, and, no doubt, enshrined within a nice strong binding with gilt lettering on the spine. Even if we don't like any of the history we've got now, we never seem to lose hope in the history of the future.

During the three and a half hours of interviews Bob Woodward conducted with George W. Bush for *Plan of Attack*, his almost instant book on the invasion of Iraq, the journalist asked the president how history would judge his war. "Bush smiled," Woodward writes. " 'History,' he said, shrugging, taking his hands out of his pockets, extending his arms out and suggesting with his body language that it was so far off. 'We won't know. We'll all be dead.' "

He shouldn't count on it. We all want to be around for *that* history. ■

*Andie Tucher commits both history and journalism at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism.*

## The road to frustration.



**ROUGH  
ROAD  
AHEAD**

In Missouri, where highways are among the worst in the nation, drivers are paying with their lives. Journalists at The Kansas City Star turned the spotlight on a sovereign highway department with a troubling history of waste and mismanagement.

Nearly half of U.S. roads are rated good or very good. In Missouri, that number drops to 15 percent. Driving on that state's under-funded, poorly maintained highways is a tooth-rattling, bone-jarring experience. And motorists are paying the price with costly repair bills and an alarming number of accident-related fatalities.

In a detailed, scientific study, Kansas City Star journalists examined more than 3,800 miles of highways across three states and mapped Missouri's worst stretches. They also exposed the state's Department of Transportation (MoDOT) as a bloated bureaucracy that operates with almost no accountability or oversight.

The Star's two-part series, "State of Disrepair," provided readers with detailed analysis and reporting that identified the problems and potential solutions. As a result of The Star's investigation, Missouri's state auditor called for sweeping changes at MoDOT. And residents of Kansas City learned how a Knight Ridder newspaper always goes the extra mile for its readers.



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St. Paul (Minn.) Pioneer Press  
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Philadelphia Daily News  
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The Wichita (Kan.) Eagle  
el Nuevo Herald (Miami)  
The Macon (Ga.) Telegraph  
Belleville (Ill.) News-Democrat  
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The (Myrtle Beach, S.C.) Sun News  
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Bradenton (Fla.) Herald  
The (San Luis Obispo, Calif.) Tribune  
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## THE WORLD OF BOOKS

A First-Time Nonfiction Author Learns  
That Getting Published  
Is Not Necessarily the Hard Part

# THE EDUCATION OF STACY SULLIVAN

BY GAL BECKERMAN

## THE VAST OCEAN

One evening in 1998, a week before leaving New York to cover the war in Kosovo and long before she ever thought she'd write a book about it, Stacy Sullivan went to see a movie — Whit Stillman's *The Last Days of Disco*. As she waited for the film to start she thought about a book she had been reading, *Africa: Dispatches from a Fragile Continent*, by Blaine Harden, the former sub-Saharan Africa correspondent for *The Washington Post*. In the book was a photograph of Harden, appearing like a midget next to Manute Bol, the seven-foot-seven former NBA basketball player who came from the cow-worshipping Dinka tribe in Sudan. Glancing around the theater, she realized that the man sitting next to her was Harden. She let out what she calls a "squeal of delight." "Blaine probably never ran into squealing fans before," she says, "let alone at a movie theater." A few days later they had lunch together. Harden suggested that while in Kosovo, Sullivan keep a journal and write in it every night, no matter how tired she was. You might get a book out of it, he told her.

This all happened *before* — when the world of books was still enchanted and an author a kind of magician who existed only on book jackets; before Sullivan learned about disengaged and overloaded editors, about the central importance of your publicist, about the necessity of preferred placement in book-

stores, about the impossibility of getting your book reviewed, about the tyranny of publishers' catalogues and Barnes & Noble book buyers; before she came to understand that to be an author is to struggle, not just to get people to read your book (this has always been hard), but just to get your book in front of potential readers' eyes.

It's difficult to fathom, but nearly 175,000 books were published in 2003, a 19 percent increase from the previous year, and a mountainous climb from the 45,000 published in 1991, when the number started rising exponentially. Mostly, the difference is the output of thousands of new small publishers and self-publishers that seem to multiply, rabbit-like, every year. At last count, the Publishers Marketing Association tallied 86,641 legitimate publishers with at least ten books in print. Of those, 1,804 were more substantial, with two hundred or more books to their name. Meanwhile, the miles of shelf space at Barnes & Noble outlets and the vast virtual warehouse of Amazon have made this abundance easily accessible.

But this literary cornucopia is only half the story. The past fifteen years have seen great flux in the publishing business. It is a world caught between its storied past, when challenging, risky books were championed, often at a loss, and its apparent future, one modeled on Hollywood, where only the certain blockbusters get their names on the marquee. As soon as chain stores presented the possibility of selling huge quantities of books, marketing took center stage at

most publishing houses. More and more houses were also bought up by giant media conglomerates, and these new owners raised the pressure on publishers and editors to increase profit margins. An industry that for decades saw only single-digit profits was expected to match the much higher profit margins of other communications sectors. This naturally led to a concentration of resources and marketing dollars on the big books, the ones sure to sell in the millions.

In this environment, the smaller books — travelogues about Africa, biographies of Napoleon, reconstructions of World War II battles, explorations of U.S. foreign policy — began to be seen as a liability. Such books sell, at their absolute best, no more than ten thousand to twenty thousand copies. Those that can't make this now nearly mandatory minimum have been forced to migrate to university presses and independent publishers.

Yet in spite of being increasingly driven by market pressures, publishers do still acquire thousands of serious works of nonfiction and literary fiction every year. Editors can't help falling in love with these books. For most, this is the reason they entered the business, not to publish politicians' memoirs and the latest diet books. And it's undeniable that a certain percentage of the small books, for reasons only a ouija board could predict, do catch fire and become best-selling hits — Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* or Laura Hillenbrand's *Seabiscuit* come to mind. For these books, for some reason, the stars aligned. But in general, the market-driven focus of the houses means that resources, both editorial and promotional, get diverted to the safe bets. The small ones get commissioned, but then are left in the lurch, with near zero support.

Sullivan, a thirty-six-year-old journalist who reported on the Balkan wars for *Newsweek*, has just published one of these small books. It tells the story of the Kosovo Liberation Army, the home-grown guerrilla force made up of students and farmers that fought Slobodan Milosevic's Serbian paramilitaries for control of Kosovo, a conflict that led to NATO's 1999 intervention. She found a compelling and narratively rich way to tell the story, through Florin Krasniqi, a Kosovo Albanian émigré working in Brooklyn as a roofer, who built up the KLA with an elaborate gunrunning operation and fund-raising that brought in more than \$30 million.

In many ways, the saga of doing this book, one Sullivan often refers to as a "nightmare," is typical of first-time book writers. She approached the process naively, without understanding the realities of the publishing industry. Now, with her book published and reviewed in *The Washington Post's* Book World (purely coincidentally by none other than Blaine Harden, who called it "irresistibly readable") she can't help but feel

accomplished. But she also feels something else: exasperated and sailing alone on a vast ocean of books, counting largely on luck to navigate her way through a publishing world grown increasingly cold.

## A PERFECT ARC

In 1998 Sullivan was about to leave for Kosovo to report for *The New York Times* magazine on the emergence of the KLA. In a province that had stayed out of the Balkan wars and pursued a path of peaceful protest, these new insurgents, with their clumsy raids on Serb police stations and checkpoints, seemed to have emerged out of nowhere. Among other things, Sullivan was puzzled by the strange accoutrements of the nascent force — Radio Shack walkie-talkies and U.S. army fatigues. If the Americans weren't supporting the group, who was? She asked around the Albanian community in the Bronx for someone to explain things, and one day she received an anonymous e-mail pointing her to Florin Krasniqi, the gregarious roofer with the blow-dried hair who would become her book's central character.

Before Sullivan left for Kosovo, Krasniqi handed her contact information for a few of his family members. But it wasn't until she came up against the denials and roadblocks of the notoriously reticent KLA that she realized what a valuable resource she had found in Brooklyn. Krasniqi had failed to mention that some of these family members were actually major figures in the KLA. Stuck at a roadside security barrier, she set up her satellite phone and soon found that one word from Krasniqi opened all doors. Suddenly she was allowed into training camps, shown smuggled weapons, and able to interview formerly tightlipped commanders.

It was clear that she had a great story on her hands. "I had this guy in New York who was raising money, the guys in Albania who were buying the weapons and moving them, and the family members across the border in Kosovo doing the fighting," Sullivan says. "It was a perfect triangle." It ran as a six-page spread in the *Times Magazine* in November 1998.

NATO began bombing the Serbs in March 1999. What had started as a small guerrilla force attacking Serbian targets in Kosovo led to brutal retaliatory massacres by Milosevic's forces, and ultimately a decision by the West to intervene, a war that would last seventy-eight days and cost \$45 billion. For the first time, the United States chose without invitation to use its massive military force in the service of humanitarian intervention. It seemed to augur a new phase in American foreign policy in which the U.S. and the West would become more active in quelling the many ethnic and territorial battles that raged in the cold war's wake.

With the contacts she had cultivated, Sullivan was

able to cover the war closely from the KLA's perspective. And she also had a personalized view of how the war came to be. This kind of narrative arc was perfect for a book. As soon as the war ended she began writing a proposal. But before she could finish, she was contacted by a Manhattan literary agent, Esmond Harmsworth. He had read a piece she'd written in the now-defunct women's magazine *Mirabella*, about a sixteen-year-old Albanian-American volunteer, Linda Muriqi, and her decision to leave the Bronx for Kosovo and fight with the KLA.

Harmsworth says he often finds his clients by following up on articles that strike him as "exceptionally well written and exploring a new subject." He pursued Sullivan by telephone until she decided to let him represent her. She told him she already had in mind a book that would be much more expansive than just the story of Linda Muriqi.

Although Sullivan had a crystallized idea of what the book would be about, Harmsworth says they spent hours discussing "how much she would include, where she would start, where she would finish, what the narrative structure would be."

These days, agents set the bar for entering the world of publishing. There was a time when getting an agent was the easy part, when even without a polished proposal, an agent might be willing to take a risk on a writer who showed promise and to develop an idea with the writer. And although agents such as these might still exist, they, like editors who actually mold a text, are becoming exceedingly rare. This makes sense. If it is harder to find a publishing house to acquire a serious book, then agents, who depend for their livelihood on selling books to these houses, should be more reluctant to spend their time on tomes that may never find their place next to a Frappuccino at a Barnes & Noble café. Harmsworth is not alone when he says, "I don't take on a writer unless we know exactly where the idea is going."

With Sullivan this was clear from the get-go. And by early 2001, the proposal was ready to send out to about a dozen of the top New York publishing houses. Knopf, PublicAffairs, and St. Martin's immediately expressed strong interest. Together, they represent the range of styles at the elite houses. On the one hand there is Knopf and PublicAffairs, which take on a very limited number of books, but can invest a lot of energy and resources in their select few. St. Martin's, on the other hand, has a much larger list, with many books that might not have found a home anywhere else, but with a staff that often gets spread thin and has a throw-it-on-the-wall-and-see-if-it-sticks attitude about promoting smaller books.

The three interested houses were not all owned by the same company, which was lucky for Sullivan. With

increased consolidation, where a giant like Bertelsmann owns a huge percentage of the market through imprints like Random House and Knopf, this happens often enough. When a situation does arise in which multiple houses owned by the same company are interested in acquiring a book, they caucus to decide who will get it and what kind of bid will be offered. Whereas many houses competing against one another once might have produced a larger advance, now a group of houses can fix the price.

Sullivan met with the interested editors at all three publishing houses. In an age of marketing, these pre-acquisition interviews have become standard. They are a way for the house to see if the author is presentable and can articulately explain his or her book. Gayle Feldman, who has worked in publishing since 1976 and is currently a contributor to *Publishers Weekly*, wrote in her report for the National Arts Journalism Program, *Best and Worst of Times: The Changing Business of Trade Books, 1975-2002*, that "whether publishers like to admit it or not, an author's telegenicity, promotability, and age enter increasingly

Sales and marketing technically can't veto a book, but they can express an opinion and it will have a lot of weight

into the acquisition equation, particularly for new authors whose careers need to be 'made.' " Feldman herself, who wrote a family history of cancer, was asked at one of her meetings with potential publishing houses if she would be willing to cry on camera.

At Knopf and PublicAffairs, Sullivan met one-on-one with the editors. But at St. Martin's she walked into a large conference room filled with about a dozen people, from publicists to marketing people to the editor-in-chief. They asked questions and Sullivan had to sell her book to them, referring to the numbers of educated Albanians living in America and her vague connections to prominent writers and high-ranking government officials involved in the war in Kosovo. Also in the conference room was Diane Higgins, the interested editor. An author can "come off very well on the page," she says, "but it's just as important in this media-centric world that the author comes off well in publicity as well, in person." Sullivan, well-spoken and charismatic, impressed them all. It was a good thing. Sales and marketing technically



PHOTOS BY JOSE MINER

can't veto a book, Higgins said, but "they can express an opinion and it will have a lot of weight."

Eventually, although all three houses had professed strong interest, only St. Martin's made a bid. At Knopf, Jonathan Siegel, who had edited an earlier, critically acclaimed but poorly selling book about the Balkans by Peter Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War*, was the interested editor. Sullivan says Siegel told her, "Sales won't take another book about the Balkans from me."

St. Martin's offered a \$35,000 advance. Sullivan had expected more, but it seems that although publishers insist there is no "typical" advance, this sum was fairly standard for an unknown writer taking on such a serious subject. Diane Higgins explains that the advance is the result of a profit-and-loss analysis. "If sales and marketing and our editorial intuition tell us that this book will find x amount of readers, it's from there that we do a computerized analysis," Higgins says. "We figure in all the given marketing expenses and production expenses and from that decide what kind of advance we can afford. It's a calculated risk. But it's all computerized these days."

Higgins had a reputation Sullivan was familiar with. She had recently edited a memoir by Joyce Maynard, *At Home in the World*, about Maynard's affair with J.D. Salinger, and had brought St. Martin's commercial success with the Holocaust memoir *The Pianist* by Wladyslaw Szpilman, later made into an Oscar-winning movie. But interestingly, as Higgins notes, she got her start working as a publicist and it was as a publicity director that she began acquiring books. "That gives you an idea of how the company has looked more toward sales," she says.

At a celebratory deal-signing lunch, Sullivan told

Stacy Sullivan, above, reaps the reward for three years of lonely work at her book party.

Florin Krasniqi, opposite, the Brooklyn roofer who stars in Sullivan's book.

Higgins that she was hungry for a lot of editing. Higgins said she hoped this would be the first of many lunches. As it turned out, throughout the next three years, Sullivan would see Higgins only once more (by chance, as she stopped by St. Martin's to drop off some photographs). For a book like Sullivan's, not a high-priority acquisition, this was not unusual. What it meant, though, was that she was about to enter the solitary cave of book writing without so much as a pocket flashlight.

## FROM EIGHTY TO ONE HUNDRED

The book party for *Be Not Afraid for You Have Sons in America: How a Brooklyn Roofer Helped Lure the U.S. into the Kosovo War* was on a terrace overlooking Bryant Park, the smidgen of green amid the skyscrapers of midtown Manhattan. It was a muggy day, and even toward evening the temperature was in the nineties. Sullivan had thrown out her back the week before and was on pain-killers, but stood smiling in the center of the party dressed in a rhinestone-fringed, salmon-colored sleeveless blouse that set off her thick auburn hair. She kissed cheeks and shook hands in the sweltering heat.

Swirling around her on the crowded terrace were representatives of the two worlds that had never been far from Sullivan's mind as she sat for the past three years in front of her laptop. Members of the publishing world stood around in sunglasses, eating grilled shrimp on skewers and recognizing one another from yoga class. Among them was Esmond Harmsworth, looking the dandy in a blue plaid jacket that he kept on in spite of the heat, greeting everyone as "Stacy's agent." Chris Hedges, the *New York Times* war correspondent who wrote a blurb for the book jacket, stopped in for two minutes. So did an editor from *Vogue*.

On the other side of the terrace, mostly drinking Heinekens, were the Albanians. Florin Krasniqi signed copies of the books and greeted everyone with bear hugs. The men all had cell-phone holsters clipped to their belts, faces weathered like sandpaper, and capped teeth. Most were former KLA fighters. Sullivan said one invitee had called St. Martin's to r.s.v.p. for the party and asked if there would be a cover charge.

Every once in a while, one world would try to approach the other. Midway through the party, Haxhi Dervisholli walked over to a woman in Jackie O sunglasses sipping white wine and said, "I am in book." "Oh really, who are you?" she asked. "I am man what lost his leg." Spotting a copy of the book sitting nearby, he grabbed it, and turned to the index. Finding his last name, he read out loud: "Dervisholli, 244, 270 to 273, 298." Behind him sat Florim Lajqi, a young American-Albanian fighter for the KLA profiled in the sec-



ond half of the book. "That's nothing," he said. "I'm, like, the whole last three chapters."

For Sullivan, though slightly drugged and frantic, this was the reward: to watch her book out in the world, held in someone's hands, discussed. This was the magic. But the writing had been lonely and difficult. Her small advance meant she needed to secure grants, one from the German Marshall Fund, another from the Fund for Investigative Journalism. She also worked as an editor for the Crimes of War Project Web site. Even larger advances than Sullivan's become almost financially inconsequential when you consider that an agent's 15 percent is removed and that the money is paid out most often in thirds (when the contract is signed, the manuscript delivered, and the book published). Jacob Levenson, whose first book, *The Secret Epidemic: The Story of AIDS and Black America*, was published earlier this year, says that the "grueling financial burdens" of writing a book are substantial. He spent much of the year after he signed his contract for a fairly small advance writing grant proposals to foundations. In the end, he says, if you become too fixated on the financial rewards alone, you can drive yourself crazy. "I've heard people get buried in the calculus of how much they made and was it really worth it," Levenson says. "But you really need to think of it as an investment in a subject and an investment in your career and the community of people you are going to work with — the nonfinancial rewards."

For Sullivan, the most difficult pressure came not from financial burdens. It was the isolation of writing a book without getting feedback from an editor. As a magazine writer, Sullivan was used to a continuous and sometimes daily conversation with an editor. There was something alienating, and at times paralyzing, about being suddenly left alone.

Sullivan sent drafts to Higgins and kept waiting for comments that never came. And Higgins doesn't deny that she did almost no editing on Sullivan's book. "Because Stacy has such inner editorial talent as well as the journalistic gift, she self-edited much of the book without needing my guidance," Higgins says. She adds that a book's marketability plays no factor in deciding how to allot her time and energy. "There are no such calculations," she insists. "It's not as if I say, 'This book is going to be bigger. It's projected to sell more copies. It's projected to be more marketable. Therefore I will spend more time on it.' I don't edit that way and I don't acquire that way. It's really just the need of the author and what the manuscript is crying out for."

While this may be true, there is nonetheless an overwhelming trend in publishing of editors who don't really edit. And for the most part this is a function of the increasingly market-driven aspect of the business. Elisabeth Sifton at Farrar, Straus and Giroux



is quoted in Gayle Feldman's report as saying that by the 1990s, it was clear that "editors were valued for the deals they could do, not for work well done or talent nurtured." This is not true across the board. There are still many editors who painstakingly pore over many drafts and develop collaborative relationships with their authors. But more and more, editors are busy looking for the next big book and simply ask to see a manuscript when it's done and then send it off to a copyeditor.

Alice Truax can attest to this shift in the status quo. A former editor at *The New Yorker*, Truax is now one of a growing number of freelance editors whom writers pay out of their own threadbare pockets to get additional editing for their books. She recently had her first big success with the critically acclaimed *Random Family*, by the first-time author Adrian Nicole LeBlanc. Truax says she gets offered more work than she can take on. The reasons authors come to her vary. Some have simply had a bad relationship with their editors or the publishing house. Others come to the realization that they aren't going to get edited at all. But editing is crucial, Truax says, and can greatly improve a book, either through line edits or larger restructuring. Yet "it appears that many houses have abandoned the practice of a stringent final edit, the belief that an extra week or month at the end of the process is necessary and can radically improve a book's quality," Truax says. "But the difference between eighty percent there and a hundred percent there is a big difference, the difference between a book that is acceptable and a book that is truly memorable. And if the houses are no longer willing to make that investment, it's everybody's loss."

Sullivan signed her book deal in mid-2001, and her first deadline was September 15 of that year. She realized, a month before the date, that she would have only half ready. Then came



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September 11. It had taken her time to focus and settle into the writing, but after spending a few weeks transfixed, like most New Yorkers, in front of the television, she began to feel completely incapacitated by the shift in the world's attention. The book just didn't feel relevant anymore. When her idea was sold, the war in Kosovo had seemed to be a key for understanding future U.S. foreign policy. Her book was to be a ground-level account of this new era of humanitarian intervention. In a matter of minutes, this storyline had been eclipsed by terrorism and holy war, and all her journalist friends were rushing off to Afghanistan. Adding to Sullivan's woes, she had also grown disillusioned with her book's heroes. Once the NATO bombing ended and the Serbian paramilitary was forced to leave Kosovo, the Kosovo Albanians quickly began harassing the small Serbian population. From once being the victims, they had become the perpetrators of the violence. "I felt sort of betrayed and distraught and I started hating all my characters and I just had a hard time writing it," Sullivan says.

She sent the first half, waited for feedback, and says all she got back was a note saying, "Excellent work. When can you be finished?" Discouraged by the lack of substantive response, she nevertheless kept working.

Her new deadline was July 2003. After two more years of work, she managed to turn in a sprawling 600-page draft that she hoped her editor would then slice in half. It was all the material she had amassed, including a long digression in the form of a travelogue of her time on the road with the war photographer Ron Haviv. In short, nothing that was ready for publication.

A few weeks later, waiting for a call from her editor, Sullivan got a package in the mail containing her 600-page ramble — copyedited and with an attached index. She panicked. "I had turned in what I thought was a draft and I had gotten back this copyedited manuscript," Sullivan says. "They were just going to print that. And it was so rough. There was no way." But the book was already on the conveyor belt. It was listed in the next season's catalogue and the sales representatives had begun pitching it to booksellers. Everyone, including her agent, told her there was really nothing to be done. But Sullivan insisted they pull the plug. "It wreaked such havoc," she says. "They had to take it off the production train, where it takes on a life of its own."

She then edited it herself, cutting out about three hundred pages, drawing on her boyfriend, whom she calls a "business type," to help her. Still, battles raged. The art department kept giving her inappropriate covers. One had a picture of Albanians wrapped in the American flag at a demonstration, which would have been fine, "except that they were all cross-eyed and ugly." Another was an almost exact copy of the jacket design of Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*. According to Sullivan, "They just said, 'Stacy Sullivan is writing a serious book about Kosovo. That's sort of like Philip Gourevitch's serious book about Rwanda. Let's do it like that.'" Finally, she approached the art department herself, suggesting what photo and color to use.

By the end of last year, the book was out of her hands and in print, at an initial run of 5,000 copies. By this point, she had long abandoned the illusion that her publisher cared about her book's fate. "It's your book,"

Sullivan now tells herself. "It's not your agent's, your editor's, or your publisher's. It's your baby and you have to nurture it."

## BETWEEN MILK AND YOGURT

In a Barnes & Noble bookstore in Brooklyn, Sullivan's book sits on a table with about sixty other new books on current affairs. Hers is an ordinary-looking book with a simple black-and-white photo on the cover, easily missed among the screaming Bush books competing for attention (Michael Moore's huge grizzled face, Bush holding hands with Saudi Prince Abdullah, Cheney's snarling mug). Hers is a guppy in this vast ocean of books, swimming among the sharks.

Sullivan's publicist, Gregg Sullivan (no relation), is the person most capable of saving her from her guppy's fate. But he is also overseeing the publicity for Newt Gingrich's new book. To Stacy, there is little doubt about where he is going to spend his time. In the past there used to be a rule of thumb that a dollar per book printed would be spent on publicity. But this practice has long disappeared. Not only does it cost so much more to support traditional promotion, such as an author's book tour, which now costs about \$1,500 a city, but today, with the advent of the mega-bookstore, there are many more factors involved.

In a 2000 report for The Authors Guild, David Kirkpatrick, now a *New York Times* reporter, made explicit the effects of chain stores on what are commonly known in the industry as midlist books — those like Sullivan's that aren't expected to be bonanzas for publishing houses. "If there is a single reason why midlist book sales are lagging, it is the chain's merchandising policies," Kirkpatrick wrote. "First, the chain's aggressive discounting of best-sellers diverts sales away from other books. Second, the chains have used their market clout and organizational sophistication to win a variety of payments from publishers that have the effect of putting midlist books, independent booksellers, and small presses all at a constant disadvantage."

Sullivan doesn't know how her book got on a table with the new releases in that Brooklyn Barnes & Noble. As Kirkpatrick explains, chain stores usually take money for such preferred placement. Or, as some like to say, they've gone into the real estate business. Here's how it works: publishers buy what is called advertising co-op space. Chain stores and an increasing number of larger independents are allowed to retain 3 to 5 percent of each year's net sales for advantageously promoting certain books — this sum can be significant if you consider that Barnes & Noble might order 100,000 copies of an anticipated hit and receive from \$50,000 to \$100,000 from the publisher. Largely on the recommendations of those publishers, booksellers decide which books will be promoted with the money. This means that profitable books are moved to the front of the stores and showcased in windows, on tables, and at the more heavily trafficked ends of aisles. This places books like Sullivan's at a disadvantage. No ad co-op money was set aside for her book. This, along with the fact that the best-selling books are discounted as much as 25 to 30 percent, all leads to, as Kirkpatrick puts it, "a reverse Robin Hood effect."

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mond in the rough and igniting the crucial word of mouth that can make a book hot. But since the 1940s these stores have been in decline, and today they account for only 18 percent of retail book sales, according to the American Booksellers Association. Chains, mostly Barnes & Noble and Borders, account for 30 percent. The remaining sales are made on the Internet, through mail-order book clubs, and by mass merchandisers like Wal-Mart.

Sullivan says her publicist has told her that her book's publicity will be "review-driven," that he won't do much more than send galley copies of her book out to the national media. He will not arrange book readings or signings, get her interviews, or push for reviews. As with the editing, Sullivan is once again on her own. "I've come to see a publisher as a distributor," she says. "They just print it and distribute it."

Sullivan knows that her best bet is to try to generate as much discussion of her book as possible. This means trying to get it reviewed, getting other people to talk about it, appearing on panels, writing op-eds, everything short of walking around Times Square wearing a sandwich board. And not only do writers have to hustle to get their books noticed, they have a limited time in which to do it. Bookstores don't like to keep books on the shelves for more than three months (Calvin Trillin has famously described the shelf life of a book as somewhere between that of milk and yogurt). So this is the window of opportunity. If it passes without one review, one book reading, one feature article or segment on NPR, it can be as if the book was never published.

## FINDING THE DINNER PARTY

**B**e Not Afraid for You Have Sons in America came out in late May, and Sullivan's first real publicity coup was an interview on *The World*, a show co-produced by the BBC, Public Radio International, and WGBH, the public broadcasting station in Boston.

After the show, Sullivan watched her ranking on Amazon go up to a high of 2,000. The Web site has become a sort of stock market of books, where obsessive writers can check how they are doing hourly. Writers have almost no other way of learning if their books are selling, even though very few really understand what the number means. The truth is that the Amazon ranking is based, like most best-seller lists, on how fast a book is selling against other books at any given moment on Amazon's site (it is updated hourly for the best-selling 10,000 books, daily for the top 100,000, and monthly for the rest). For example, if your book is ranked 20,000 on a given day, 19,999 books are selling more quickly

than yours. It is not a marker of how much a book has sold over time, which would offer a more accurate sense of how a book is doing. Nevertheless, it's all that's out there that is up to the minute, and Sullivan watches it intently. Right after her interview on *The World*, it shot up from around 1,200,000 to 2,000 (before eventually settling in the 40,000 to 60,000 range). People were listening and then going online to buy the book.

Sullivan looked for other ways to get her book noticed. She tried to set up readings and got one in a Balkan cultural center and another at the Half King, a bar in Manhattan. Her publicist warned her not to bother trying to get any Barnes & Noble events. But she knew of one store at Astor Place in Manhattan that had a Human Rights series in conjunction with Amnesty International. After she contacted the organizers, they decided to give her a reading, albeit many months away from her publication date.

She wrote letters to all the media contacts she had cultivated from her years as a journalist. One of the brighter prospects was a friend who is an executive producer at *60 Minutes* and could mention her book as part of a segment on guerrilla insurgencies.

But what she really wanted, what she was praying for, were reviews in the national media. For a book like Sullivan's this is the most effective way to induce sales. It also happens to be the most difficult. Book-review sections have been steadily shrinking over the last fifty years. The reason usually given is decreased advertising, a rationale that Steve Wasserman, book review editor at the *Los Angeles Times*, thinks is a "canard." He says it is absurd to rely on publishers to pay for space in newspapers. "I can't recall anyone demanding of the sports section that they begin to carry ads by the New York Yankees or the Los Angeles Dodgers," Wasserman says.

Whether it be lack of advertising or, as Wasserman supposes, a "strong anti-intellectual tradition that still beats at the heart of most newspapers," or simply that readers just don't care for reviews, there is less space devoted to books. It's hard to imagine now, but in the 1940s, an average issue of *The New York Times Book Review* was sixty-four pages long, more than twice today's length. And those influential major newspapers that still devote pages to books cannot possibly cover even a small fraction of the books published. Wasserman says that at the *Los Angeles Times* only 1,500 books a year are reviewed or mentioned out of the more than 100,000 published. Like most book-review editors, he finds them by going through the catalogues of publishing houses and trying to anticipate "the more important, significant, or entertaining books." He then finds "authoritative and occasionally mischievous"

reviewers who are good matches for the books. He describes the process as akin to assembling a dinner party. But ultimately, Wasserman says, "the process of selection is inherently subjective, deeply unfair, almost whimsical by turns."

Sullivan worried that her book might not get noticed for purely superficial reasons. The production had been rushed, due to her missed deadline. Also, the galleys had gone out to reviewers with the wrong subtitle and no blurbs. Instead of *How a Brooklyn Roofer Helped Lure the U.S. into the Kosovo War*, it read *How Albanian Americans Fought for the Freedom of Their People*, or, as Sullivan puts it, "How Not to Get People to Read a Book." But on Sunday June 13, *The Washington Post* Book World, one of the more influential review sections, ran the unequivocally laudatory review by Blaine Harden under the headline A WAR GROWS IN BROOKLYN. Sullivan was gratified. "And he's one of my favorite writers," she said the following day.

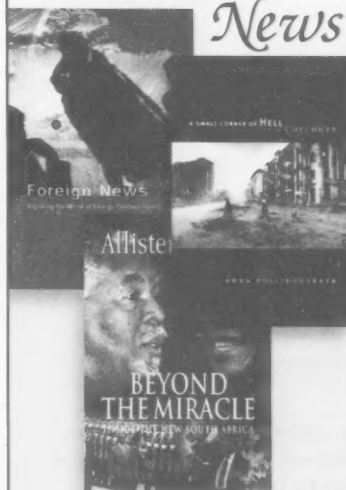
*The Washington Post* review solidified her Amazon ranking in the low 20,000 range for a good many weeks. A link to it a week later on a much-visited Web site, *Arts & Letters Daily*, made it rise to 7,000 for a day. But then it dropped back down to the 20,000 range. Sullivan watched these small changes with excitement. It all felt out of her hands. In her naiveté she had thought that all serious books were reviewed in the major newspapers, especially *The New York Times*. A writer friend had told her, "Unless you get the *Times*, you're dead."

But her publicist informed her that she wasn't on the list of books to be reviewed by the *Times*. Sullivan started writing letters to all the people she knew inside the paper, to see if they could make sure the book got the attention of the Book Review staff. This was exactly what she should do, her agent told her. But then she did something everyone advised her not to do. Thinking her book had been overlooked because of the less-than-enticing subtitle, she wrote a letter directly to the new editor of the Book Review, Sam Tanenhaus. "I tried to be as polite as I could be," she says, "I said I hope I hadn't overstepped my bounds."

As of this writing, Sullivan's book has not been reviewed by the *Times*. It sits on the shelves in the Eastern European history section of most Barnes & Noble stores and, in that one Brooklyn store, by some fluke, on the current-affairs table. Her editor promises, though, that if she manages to get that *60 Minutes* spot, St. Martin's will find a way to get more prominent display. Meanwhile, she sends out letters, calls all her journalist friends, tries to set up more readings. In a way, she's lucky. Her book has won more attention than most. But she is hoping for more — that the strenuous and financially unrewarding effort will at least spark a discussion, will entertain a few people with a good story, will contribute to an understanding of foreign policy or of the Balkans. Her fear now, the fear of most writers, is that none of this will happen, that her work will just get lost, that it will just soundlessly vanish into that huge ocean of books. ■

*Gal Beckerman, a former assistant editor at CJR, failed to be dissuaded by his research on this piece and is working on his first book. For more on who owns what in the book world, visit [www.cjr.org/book-consolidation.asp](http://www.cjr.org/book-consolidation.asp).*

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# IDEAS AND REVIEWS

## BOOKS

### COURAGE IN PROFILES

Risks and Rewards  
Of Probing the Powerful

*Pols: Great Writers on American  
Politicians from Bryan to Reagan*  
Edited by Jack Beatty  
PublicAffairs. 544 pp. \$28

BY CHRISTOPHER HANSON

Books make the suitcase heavy, but campaign reporters should bring Jack Beatty's anthology with them this fall for inspiration and maybe a dose of humility. The contributors' bold imagination, wit, and critical judgment set a very high standard. Yet even these exceptional talents sometimes slip as they struggle to capture the essential strengths and latent limitations of their subjects. Political profiling can be a dangerous game.

Consider Norman Mailer's audacious take on candidate John F. Kennedy, who, as Mailer puts it, challenged America to leave the "tasteless, sexless, odorless" Eisenhower fifties behind and conquer a New Frontier. Kennedy, says Mailer, rekindled a strange American yearning to become "more extraordinary and more adventurous, or else perish" — a yearning that had turned inward once our movement west stopped at the Pacific.

Written just after the 1960 Democratic convention, this was probably the first profile to cast JFK as a matinee hero qua living myth, a trigger of dark emotion as well as a symbol of promise. Kennedy was running the rapids on a "subterranean river

of untapped, ferocious, lonely and romantic desires, that concentration of ecstasy and violence which is the dream life of the nation."

Mailer's assessment might have seemed too daring and insufficiently fact-based to some when it appeared in the October 1960 *Esquire*. But his words proved prescient as the sixties swept by in a flood of assassination, including Kennedy's own; sexual and narcotic rebellion, in which Kennedy secretly joined; and military escalation on his most forbidding frontier, Vietnam.

At the same time, Mailer's article shows how a storyline can be carried too far. "Not everyone can discharge their furies on an analyst's couch," Mailer writes, suggesting that Kennedy felt driven instead to fire his psychic gun on the world stage. Against him stood a gray flannel candidate of unctuous modesty and professed steadiness. In Mailer's account, a vote for Richard Nixon was a vote for "psychic security."

How odd this seems today, when Nixon, not Kennedy, is widely seen as the man who projected psychoneurotic rage. JFK, after all, overruled his aides and holstered his nukes to forestall war over Cuba in 1962. But when North Vietnam

launched a ground offensive ten years later, as Nixon sought reelection, aides faced a president gone wild. Here are passages, excerpted in *Pols*, from Oval Office tapes recorded in spring 1972 and released in 2002:

President: I still think we ought to take the dikes out now. Will that drown people?

Kissinger: About two hundred thousand people.

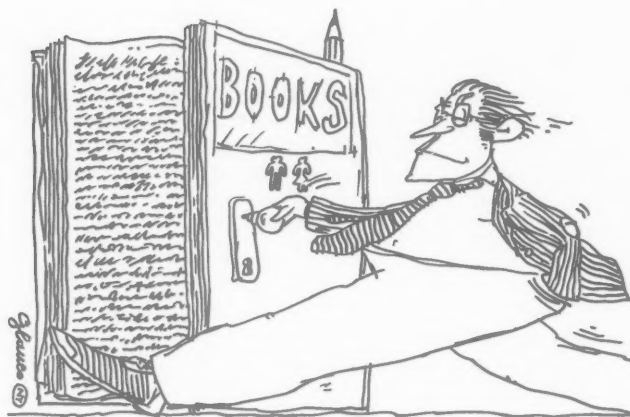
President: . . . I'd rather use the nuclear bomb . . .

Kissinger: That, I think, would be just too much . . .

President: The nuclear bomb, does that bother you? . . . I just want you to think big, Henry, for Christsakes.

(One week later) President: . . . I want that place bombed to smithereens . . . Let it fly, *Let it fly* . . . Now, goddamit, we're gonna do it. We're going to *cream* them. This is not in anger or anything. This old business, that I'm 'petulant,' that's all bullshit . . . Whatever happens to South Vietnam, we are going to *cream* North Vietnam . . . For once, we've got to use the maximum power of this country . . . against this *shit-ass* little country: to win the war.

Meanwhile, White House reporters — especially at the wires — cov-





ered Nixon as if he were a normal man. He seemed tightly twisted up close, but they dared not say so. They were "gelded" by the conventions of objectivity, as Beatty puts it, "and straight writing straightens Nixon. By normalizing him, it distorts him."

One alternative was satire. Philip Roth's mind boggled when Nixon kept the convicted My Lai mass murderer Lt. William Calley — a "scapegoat" to right-wing constituents — out of jail pending presidential review of the case. At the same time Nixon was on record opposing abortion because it violated "the sanctity of human life."

"I could have done the popular thing, of course, and come out *against* the sanctity of human life," Roth's President Trick E. Dixon declares in an excerpt from *Our Gang*. When a citizen asks Trick how he would feel if one of Calley's Vietnamese civilian victims had been pregnant, Dixon surmises she must not have been "showing." "The lieutenant could have had no knowledge of her pregnancy, and thus, in no sense of the word would he have committed an abortion."

Unlike Roth, most writers are compelled to seek the inner candidate in the world of hard fact — risky business, because there is no consensus on what outward evidence, or "Rosebud," points to that essence, as the selections in the anthology show.

■ Some pol-watchers focus on an office-seeker's use or misuse of language. When Warren Harding, a former newsman, wrote his own inaugural address in 1921, H.L. Mencken saw it as evidence that the new president would spend his administration pandering to imbeciles, and was probably one himself.

The speech rolled resonantly off Harding's tongue, but was little more than a tissue of meaningless phrases, to wit: "I would like government to do all it can to mitigate,

then, in understanding, in mutuality of interest, in concern for the common good, our tasks will be solved."

Harding's prose "drags itself out of the dark abysm . . . of pish, and crawls insanelly up the topmost pinnacle of posh," as Mencken so memorably put it. Moreover, the speech "bristled with words misused: *Civic* for *civil*, *luring* for *alluring*, . . . *referendum* for *reference*, even *task* for *problem*. 'The task is to be solved' — what could be worse?"

In the Mencken tradition, some journalists have pointed to the incumbent president's misuse of language, suggesting he might be running a deficit up top. Yet — Mencken notwithstanding — fuzzy or fractured phraseology isn't proof of incompetence or stupidity. Fred

anger at moneyed interests helped fuel his political ambition. Yet he earned a reputation for integrity, fairness, and delicate compromise, as shown in an excerpt from Robert Caro's *The Path to Power*.

■ Another troublesome trait is inflexibility. After the stock market crash of 1929, President Hoover stood stubbornly by his free market ideals, declining to take action as the economy collapsed around him. As the historian Richard Hofstadter describes him in an excerpt from *Herbert Hoover and the Crisis of American Individualism*, this former mining engineer was arrogant by nature and disdainful of political give-and-take.

Of course, historians are in the business of looking backward. It is far riskier to assess the qualities that would make for a good president

## A CANDIDATE PROFILE THAT DRAWS NO CONCLUSIONS 'REMINDS ME OF A STRING OF WET SPONGES'

— H.L. Mencken

Greenstein points out in an excerpt from *The Hidden Hand Presidency* that President Eisenhower could write very lucid prose but would muddle his syntax deliberately in press conferences. His aim was to confuse reporters and voters as to his intentions on such grave matters as American use of tactical nuclear weapons.

In other words, a politician who misuses words and mangles sentences is not necessarily an idiot. He might be a liar.

For that matter, he might be showing the effects of nervous anxiety, brought on by the job.

■ Several *Pols* contributors say we should be wary of those who seem bitter and win votes by stirring up resentments. Such wariness makes sense, given the dark records of Huey Long, Nixon, and others.

But how is the journalist to know if she is dealing with an exception? House Speaker Sam Rayburn, for instance, grew up toiling on an impoverished family farm. Populist

when examining a nonincumbent in real time, as journalists must, unaware of future crises and the leadership traits they will demand. What appeared to be Hoover's strength of conviction in 1928 was revealed as dangerous obstinacy only after the crash.

*Pols* provides ample evidence that predicting success in governing based on preelection character analysis is akin to phrenology. On the other hand, to adapt a line from Mencken, a candidate profile that draws no conclusions "reminds me of a string of wet sponges; . . . of stale bean-soup."

This book shows that excellence in profiling is within reach, especially if you're willing to go to the edge. So if a new Norman, or Norma, Mailer is typing away out there, the election clock is ticking. It's time to let 'er rip. ■

*Christopher Hanson has covered three presidential campaigns. He teaches journalism at the University of Maryland.*

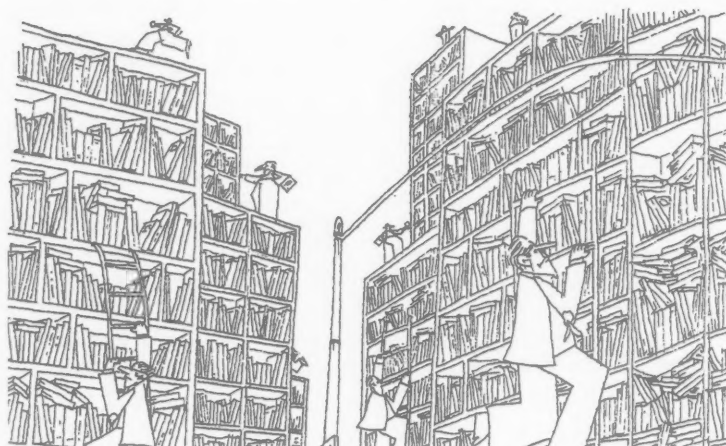
## EXCERPTS

## IDEAS &amp; REVIEWS

# FROM THE BUSH BOOKSHELF

IN THIS CAMPAIGN SEASON,  
A BUMPER CROP OF BOOKS YIELDS SOME TASTY BITS ABOUT THE PRESS

DRAWINGS BY GLAUCO DELLA SCUCCA



But perhaps the most significant lesson [George W.] had learned from his father was how not to deal with the media. His father had made himself available to news people and tried to befriend them. He gave dozens of press conferences, lingering until every question was answered, and he maintained a private correspondence with many members of the press. (Even after his presidency, he kept up an on-again, off-again e-mail correspondence with Maureen Dowd of *The New York Times*.)

Yet George W. believed that the media had repaid his father by stabbing him in the back. Stung by a sense of betrayal, in the final year of his administration George H.W. Bush regularly lambasted the media and became obsessed with media bias.

George W. was determined to take an entirely different approach. Instead of befriending the media, his strategy was essentially to ignore them. "All the wagging tongues," he said in his first few days in office. "I personally am going to completely ignore them."

**THE BUSHES: PORTRAIT OF A DYNASTY**, BY PETER SCHWEIZER AND ROCHELLE SCHWEIZER. DOUBLEDAY. 574 PP. \$27.95

The secretary's presentation took seventy-six minutes. The public undressing of intelligence sources, methods, and details was probably more important than their substance, though Powell listed more than one hundred specifics. The important element was that it was Powell who made the case. The mixture of understatement, overstatement, and personal passion made for riveting television.

Mary McGrory, the renowned liberal columnist for *The Washington Post*, and a Bush critic, wrote in the lead column for the next day's op-ed page of Powell's "*J'Accuse*" speech, "I can only say that he persuaded me, and I was as tough as France to convince." She said that she had been

hoping Powell would oppose war, but "The cumulative effect was stunning. I was reminded of the day long ago when John Dean, a White House toady, unloaded on Richard Nixon and you could see the dismay written on Republican faces that knew impeachment was inevitable." She added, "I'm not ready for war yet. But Colin Powell has convinced me that it might be the only way to stop a fiend, and that if we do go, there is reason."

At the White House, Dan Bartlett understood the importance of what Powell had done. He began calling it "the Powell buy-in."

**PLAN OF ATTACK**, BY BOB WOODWARD. SIMON & SCHUSTER. 467 PP. \$28

Although Colin Powell, Paul Wolfowitz, and David Kay all in their different ways argued that a "smoking gun" was completely unnecessary, there is little doubt that the U.S. administration would have dearly wanted to find one and make it exhibit number one in the case for war. In the days after the meeting of the Council, the administration went to the media and voiced its displeasure that UNMOVIC had not held up either the drone or the cluster bomb as evidence of violations by Iraq. Presumably the aim was both to give publicity to the alleged smoking guns and to erode confidence in the inspectors, who had failed to sound an alarm about the items.

The U.S. administration's weekend information drive during the first days of March had the expected desired echo, at least in the conservative media. I learnt that I had been vilified, crucified, and made to look like an imbecile . . . A tabloid headline proclaimed that Blix tricksirk U.S. I could not help admiring it. I would have bought a drink for the editor who drafted it.

**DISARMING IRAQ**, BY HANS BLIX. PANTHEON. 285 PP. \$24

In recent months I have tried to piece together the truth about the attacks on myself and the disclosure of Valerie's employment by carefully studying all the coverage and by speaking confidentially with members of the press who have been following the story. A number of them have been candid with me in our private conversations but unwilling to speak publicly with the same candor. When I have asked why the reporting on the story has not been more aggressive, I have received responses that are very disturbing. A reporter told me that one of the six newsmen who had received the leak stated flatly that the pressure he had come under from the administration in the past several months to remain silent made him fear that if he did his job and reported on the leak story, he would "end up in Guantanamo" — a dark metaphor for the career isolation he would suffer at the hands of the administration. Another confided that she had heard from reporters that "with kids in private school and a mortgage on the house," they were unwilling to cross the administration.

**THE POLITICS OF TRUTH: INSIDE THE LIES THAT LED TO WAR AND BETRAYED MY WIFE'S CIA IDENTITY, BY AMBASSADOR JOSEPH WILSON.**  
CARROLL & GRAF. 514 PP. \$26

The president's interview with NBC, the first he conducted after the war had begun, was important for transitional language unveiled by Bush. Instead of insisting Saddam Hussein had actual weapons of mass destruction, the president began to clarify, telling Brokaw he was "pretty confident" America was going to discover a "weapons of mass destruction program." A program, of course, was different than an actual weapon. It only meant Hussein was trying to develop that which American political and military leaders claimed he already possessed, and possessed in mass quantities.

A "program" wasn't the reason America went to war.

If Tom Brokaw had been an aggressive interviewer, he might have asked the president about the overwhelming list of weaponry that Colin Powell had told the United Nations was in Saddam Hussein's possession. Since that tally included 500 tons of mustard gas and nerve gas, 25,000 liters of anthrax, 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin, 29,984 prohibited munitions capable of delivering chemical agents, several dozen Scud missiles, gas centrifuges to enrich uranium, 18 mobile biological factories, and long-range unmanned aerial vehicles to dispense anthrax, Brokaw missed an opportunity to read that list to the president, and then ask how it was possible that such vast quantities of weapons and materials were not easily discovered, especially since Vice President Dick Cheney had insisted the United States knew most of these weapons were in and around Tikrit.



On the fifth anniversary of the attack on Pan Am 103 in Lockerbie, Scotland, President Clinton drove to the site to say a few words and turn the dirt to begin the construction of the cairn. It was just before Christmas, cold and wet and windy. The president asked a little boy who had lost his father on the plane to join him with the shovel. He kneeled by the boy and whispered to him. A lone piper from Lockerbie played "Amazing Grace."

As people moved to their cars and out of the rain, I asked the boy's mother what the president had said. "He said, 'My father died before I was born too. Be good to your Mom.'"

That night the network news showed tape of the president heading out from the Oval Office for the cairn event, as the White House reporter talked over the tape about allegations of impropriety made by former Arkansas state troopers. They did not mention Pan Am 103.

**AGAINST ALL ENEMIES: INSIDE AMERICA'S WAR ON TERROR, BY RICHARD A. CLARKE.**  
FREE PRESS. 305 PP. \$27

Brokaw's questioning appeared more calculated to make the president squirm on matters of social import than it did to discover the logic behind important conclusions related to why Bush had taken America to war. The anchorman wanted to know if the president was going to invite French President Jacques Chirac to his ranch in Crawford, Texas. When Bush answered that his first postwar guest was to be Australian Prime Minister John Howard, Brokaw pressed again, and asked, "What About President Chirac, though?" On Middle East peace, Brokaw inquired as to whether the president intended to invite new Palestinian Prime Minister Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas] to the White House, and later, when the subject turned to dissenting voices on the war, he wanted to know if Bush planned to invite the Dixie Chicks to the White House.

Brokaw also ignored chances to ask the president about alleged connections between Al Qaeda and Hussein, letting Bush get off with his tough guy talk of, "We're on the hunt" . . . Brokaw wanted to know what parts of the war the president watched on television, if he sought advice from his parents, and if he talked with Laura about things. The collegial tone of the interview made the viewer wonder if NBC News had agreed, in advance, to ground rules in order to bag the interview ahead of competition.

**BUSH'S WAR FOR REELECTION: IRAQ, THE WHITE HOUSE, AND THE PEOPLE, BY JAMES MOORE.** JOHN WILEY & SONS. 382 PP. \$27.95

## S C E N E



## Our Readers, Ourselves

BY BRENT CUNNINGHAM

**O**n a rainy day in mid-July, several dozen journalists crowded a narrow room in the Ritz-Carlton, along New York's tony Central Park South. A bank of TV cameras lined the back, a fidgety knot of photogs maneuvered down front. We were there to hear the filmmaker Robert Greenwald discuss *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism*, his documentary that argues that Fox News is not simply tilted right, but consciously carries the Bush administration's water.

A faint current of anticipation moved through the room, more than would be expected at what was basically just another salvo in the endless media-bias war. A reporter from the *Chicago Tribune* sitting next to me swiveled to survey the crowd and wondered aloud what the hell everyone was doing here. I wondered the same about him. It's in the air, suggested a columnist with *The New York Sun*. The election. Michael Moore.


Based on what transpired in the next ninety minutes, we were there to talk at one another about the following: Will Fox sue Greenwald over his unauthorized use of its broadcasts? Is this film a fair and balanced examination of Fox, or a partisan broadside? The dramatic payoff, such as it was, came when a reporter asked Greenwald whether, given that *Outfoxed* was made with the help of lefty political groups — namely MoveOn.org — he thought he had made an “objective” film. The reporter was Fox News's Eric Shawn.

When I left it was still raining. I hailed a cab, which immediately became mired in traffic. “Trust me,” the driver said, then he began stair-stepping west, feeling his way around the tangle. His name was Emilio and he looked to be nearly fifty, with a ballcap pulled low and a Puerto Rican flag hanging from the visor. He cursed and smacked the steering wheel as he drove. I decided not to engage. Soon, though, we hit smooth sailing up Tenth Avenue, headed to Columbia. Emilio asked me if I were a teacher. I told him about CJR. “When the press screws up, we write about it,” I said. He laughed. “Man, they *always* screw up,” he said. “It’s all fake.” He opened a copy of that day’s *New York Post* to a large photo of President Bush posing with Cal Ripken and some kid at the White House Tee-Ball game. “No one believes anything Bush says anymore, but it’s still here, every day. And not just the *Post*; the *Times*, TV, all of it.”

I was about to venture a word or two about objectivity and fairness and balance — tell him where I had just been — when Emilio started talking about *Fahrenheit 9/11*. He mentioned the scene where Marine recruiters troll the mall on the poor side of Flint, Michigan, for kids with few options. “I did nearly two years in federal prison in the early seventies for refusing to be drafted,” Emilio said. “Who was in there with me? Other poor people. And when this whole thing started last year, I saw the military again, getting kids to sign up. The same shit.”

“Why didn’t you go?” I asked.

“The Vietnamese never did anything to me,” he said. “It’s the same with Iraq. Those people in Falluja? They aren’t terrorists. They just want us out of their country.”

What struck me about Emilio wasn’t his politics, really. In the twenty minutes from midtown to Columbia, he dismantled my first impression of him and revealed himself as a serious news consumer, one of those elusive readers and viewers we in the press obsess over. How to reach them, how to make them happy. Imagine his response had I managed to utter the phrase “fair and balanced.” I shut up and listened. 

RACHEL MORRIS

*Brent Cunningham is CJR's managing editor.*



# The Lower case

## Bush backs war in West Virginia

*The Oakland (Calif.) Tribune, 7/5/04*

## Trial in Iran ends abruptly in slaying of photographer

*USA Today, 7/19/04*

## Take steps to prevent drowning in children

*Sioux City (Iowa) Journal, 7/1/04*

## Officers: Property crimes made for satisfying careers

*Times-News (Henderson, N.C.), 4/18/03*

## Sears to add 30 appliance outlets

*Chicago Tribune, 6/24/04*

## Sewer district plans emergency backup

*The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer, 12/9/03*

## *Recovery at AOL Helps Time Warner Report Strong Profit*

*The New York Times, 7/29/04*

## *Time Warner Net Fell in 2nd Period; Internal Probe Set*

*The Wall Street Journal, 7/29/04*

## Mercy, nurses avert strike

*Utica (N.Y.) Dispatch, 7/1/04*

## Bill to cut spam sent to Bush

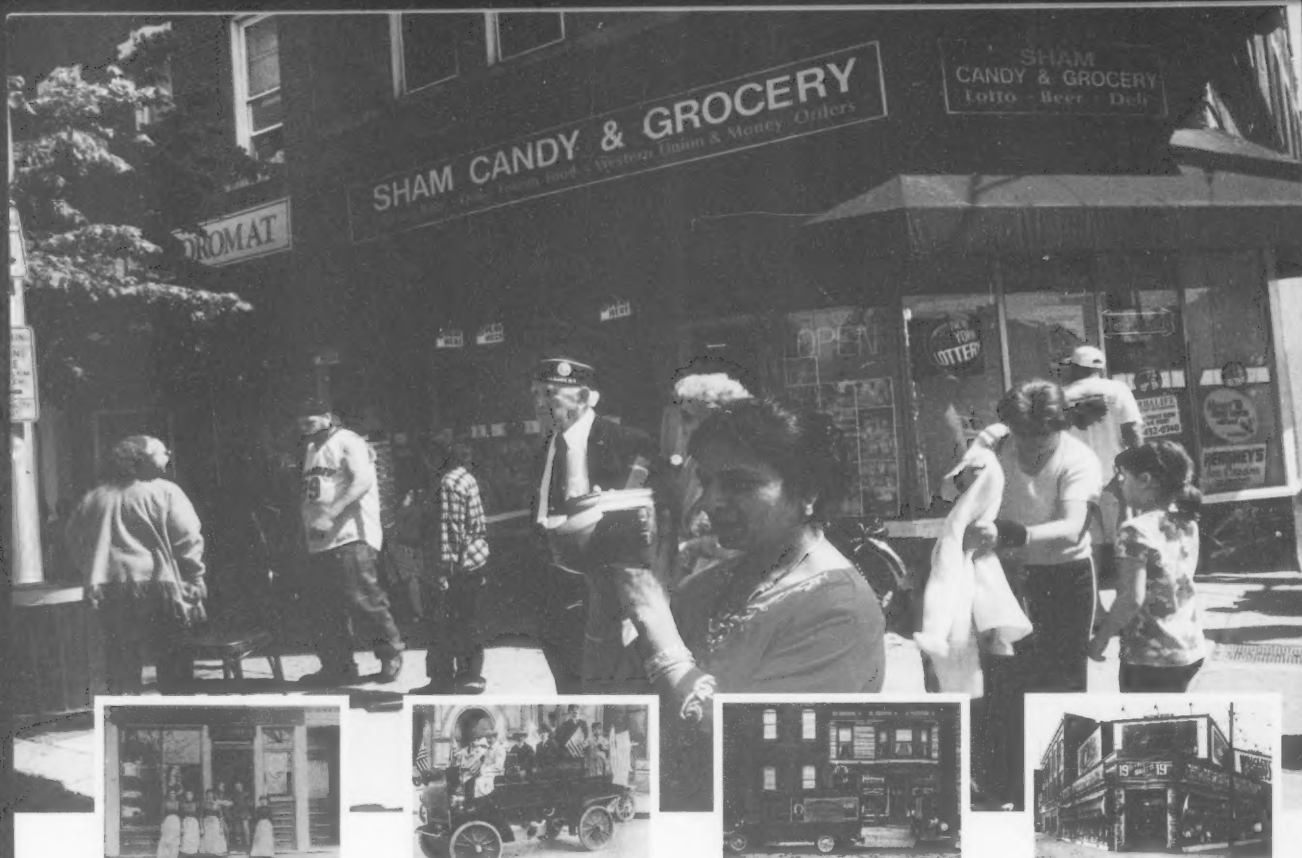
*Arizona Daily Star, 12/9/03*

## Forest Drops Constipation Drug, Analysts Worried

*Dow Jones Business News, 10/2/03*

## Peterson's mistress fingered

*Ventura County (Calif.) Star, 7/24/04*



## Seeing an old neighborhood through new eyes.



**Reporter**  
Paul Grondahl  
**Photographer**  
Michael P. Farrell

Central Avenue formed the commercial spine of Albany, N.Y. for three centuries. Faded Colonial and Victorian architecture and boarded-up storefronts now mark a thoroughfare spiraling into decline. But The Avenue is not without hope. A team of Times Union journalists – editors, reporter, photographer, artists and copy editors – embarked on a six-month project to gain a deeper understanding of the complex issues surrounding an avenue rich in cultural diversity and poor in revenues, an avenue of promise to some and of despair to others.

The result was "Central Avenue: Broken Dreams, Second Chances," a remarkable three-day series written by Paul Grondahl and photographed by Michael P. Farrell. It gave voice to hundreds of people whose stories are often overlooked—newly arrived immigrants, established shop keepers, down-and-out street dwellers, hucksters, musicians and short-order cooks. The Avenue's eclectic neighborhoods sprang to life in a dynamic medley of words and images featured in the newspaper's pages and on its award-winning Web site. Online visitors cruise The Avenue by digital video and hear the voices of the people who live and work there. See [timesunion.com/specialreports/centralave](http://timesunion.com/specialreports/centralave).

The Times Union is committed to reporting on the diversity of the community it serves. "Central Avenue: Broken Dreams, Second Chances" is just one of the many local stories the Hearst Newspapers cover every day to deliver excellence to their readers.



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